Wittgenstein and the Gadfly: Some Meta-Philosophical Reflections

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Abstract:

This paper presents metaphilosophical reflections with the aim of addressing the seemingly innocuous but actually complicated question 'What is philosophy?'. It presents a description of philosophy in three respects: (1) It describes *why* philosophy is. That is to say, it accounts for what it is that gives rise to philosophy, i.e. an ineffable kind of wonder that only increases in wondrousness upon scrutiny. (2) It describes *what* philosophy is. That is to say, it accounts for theoretical dimensions of philosophy done for its own sake *as well as* practical dimensions of philosophy done for the sake of bettering oneself and the world in which one exists. This, it achieves by drawing on metaphilosophical ideas presented by various thinkers (most notably from the Wittgensteinian tradition on the one hand, and the Socratic tradition on the other). In so doing, the account stresses not only the compatibility but also the complimentary relation between theoretical and practical aspects of philosophy. Finally, (3) the paper describes what makes philosophy *important*. Namely, the fact that it plays the vital role of fomenting epistemic dynamism and combating epistemic stagnation, social animosity and discord, and 'banal' manifestations of evil on both a societal and an individual scale.

Introduction:

What exactly is philosophy? As someone who has dedicated the majority of his (albeit short) adult life to its study, it frustrates me that I am still largely at a loss when this question is posed to me by puzzled friends, family members (most recently my 10-year-old cousin), and even passing acquaintances. Each and every time I struggle to formulate an answer at all, let alone a clever or wieldy one. Surely, being able to basically describe one's field of study should be the first thing one learns in said field of study. Any mechanical engineer, biologist, chemist, political scientist, economist or historian worth his salt can explain in relatively simple terms what it is exactly that mechanical engineering, biology, chemistry, politics, economics and history are respectively (in fact, being able to do so is probably a prerequisite for entry to many of these fields of study). But, when it comes to philosophy it seems that this does not apply, at least not to me. And, I would venture to say that few, if any philosophers, alive or dead, novice or accomplished, could say the contrary.

One thing, however, springs to mind each time I am asked 'What is philosophy?', and that is that I am quite sure that it is not at all what I thought when I first became acquainted with it. Prior to, and at the beginning of my formal studies in philosophy, I was expecting, (as

I suspect many other prospective philosophers expect) to expand my understanding of the world around me and the myriad ideas that saturate and underpin it. I thought philosophy would provide me with the knowledge and cognitive tools I needed to support and defend the convictions I already had (on everything from politics and morality to the metaphysical nature of the world I live in), and to facilitate the founding of convictions concerning matters where I did not yet have any. In short, I expected my philosophical training and education to, at least to a degree, provide me with some answers, some kind of clarity regarding what it is I think about the matters of the world. I quickly realised however that I was sorely mistaken, as it became ever clearer that the more I thought about philosophical issues, the more the few convictions I had melted away, and the more they were replaced with questions rather than answers. I had wished for clarity, and, like the perfect cliché, philosophy had given it to me, but not in the way I had envisioned. Philosophy has made clear to me only my unknowing, and the more I engage with it the more it reveals to me new reasons why I am not sure what it is I think about any given subject. Of course, it is very possible that I simply haven't done enough philosophy for it to reveal to me anything so satisfying as a kind of concrete knowledge. However, I have come to suspect that it is more likely that this observation strikes at the very heart of what philosophy is. Exploring this suspicion will therefore be the ultimate aim of this paper.

Friedrich Waismann, contemporary of Ludwig Wittgenstein may have summarised the prospect of attempting to define philosophy best in his 1956 paper when he said "What philosophy is? I don't know, nor have I a set formula to offer. Immediately I sit down to contemplate the question I am flooded with so many ideas, tumbling over one another, that I cannot do justice to all of them" (Waismann, 1968, p.1). Despite this however, I suspect that it is rather important for aspiring and accomplished philosophers alike, to dedicate at least some time toward contemplating the nature of philosophy itself, rather than our own preferred niches of philosophy, and I will therefore do so in this paper. In order to mitigate the inherently chaotic nature of attempting to define philosophy and to lend at least some structure to this investigation it will be split into three parts.

In Part 1 I will begin by examining some meta-philosophical principles inspired by Wittgenstein to show how they account for the origins of philosophical inquiry as well as getting us a good deal of the way towards an understanding what philosophy is outright by highlighting significant elements of its nature. Part 1 will then conclude with a consideration of how these Wittgensteinian principles fall short in terms of addressing certain fields of enquiry which most people would likely (and rightly) argue also constitute philosophy, in

particular, those conventionally considered to reside under the umbrella of 'practical philosophy'. Part 2 will be concerned with beginning the process of addressing these gaps. I will argue here that, when it comes to issues of practical philosophy, we can look to the original philosopher, Socrates for guidance, and that, in his work, we find the final missing elements of a basic account of philosophy. I will begin by outlining the most pertinent elements of Socrates' views on philosophy by drawing primarily from Plato's *Apology,* in which he recounts Socrates' trial before the Athenian citizenry on charges of "'corrupting the young and not believing in the gods the city believes in, but in other new divinities' (24b-c)" (Rowe in Plato, 2010, p.118). Once I have made clear the most important aspects of Socrates' overall view of philosophy, I will move on to showing that there are clear parallels between Socrates' views on philosophy and those with Wittgensteinian influences considered in Part 1**,** demonstrating that they are at the very least compatible, if not outright complimentary approaches to understanding philosophy. In Part 3, I will then show that, in addition to this compatibility, Socrates provides us with invaluable insight into the provocative, vital, and paradoxical nature of the practical dimensions of philosophy, providing us with the, thus far, missing components for a relatively comprehensive account of what philosophy is. Finally, before concluding, I will take these observations regarding the nature of philosophy's practical dimensions and examine their implications, arguing that they show philosophy to be anything but trivial.

Part 1: Wittgensteinian Principles of Philosophy

Chapter 1: What is Philosophy? Some Preliminary Remarks

So, what is philosophy? We may as well begin by looking at a simple etymological definition. Deriving from the ancient Greek word 'philosophia', 'philosophy' is an amalgamation of the two root words 'philo' (love of) and 'sophia' (wise), its literal translation coming to something like 'the love (or the pursuit) of wisdom' (Klein, 1966, p.1173-1174, 1474). Accordingly, the philosoph*er*, is, etymologically speaking, a lover or pursuer of wisdom. So, do we have our answer here? Are philosophers just neurotic over-thinkers who are incapable of bringing themselves to respond to the simple question, 'What is philosophy?' with the simple answer, 'Philosophy is the love or pursuit of wisdom'? Given its rather straightforward etymology, it seems rather strange that those who purport to dedicate a good deal of their cognitive efforts to the pursuit of *wisdom* are so unable to articulate this simple fact.

I would argue, however, that to say that philosophy is simply the love or pursuit of wisdom does not really tell anyone anything. It replaces the question of what philosophy is with what it is to be a pursuer of wisdom. In this way, to respond to the question, 'What is philosophy?' without going further than referencing its etymological origins is a deflection, and quite a reductive and disingenuous one at that, rather than a real answer. I think philosophers realise this and that this is a major reason why many prefer instead to stumble through a less than graceful answer. Nevertheless, we have learned at least one thing from these short remarks on the etymology of philosophy. Although we have replaced the question 'What is philosophy?' with 'What is wisdom, and what does pursuing it entail?', we at least now know that philosophy is intimately tied to wisdom, whatever that might be, and this is already an, albeit small, step in the right direction.

Considering the meta-philosophical nature of these questions, we would do well to take a look at some views inspired by one of the few well established (although still highly controversial) meta-philosophers of our time, Ludwig Wittgenstein. I say 'inspired by' because we will not be looking exclusively at his own works, but at what I will call a 'Wittgensteinian' approach to philosophy in general. An in depth study of Wittgenstein would span volumes, and the purpose of this paper is not to investigate Wittgenstein's philosophy itself, but rather to sketch a holistic answer to the question 'What is philosophy?'. Therefore, I will use the Wittgensteinian approach only as a springboard from which to advance this endeavour. And, although I will show that such an approach makes note of several important elements of what philosophy is, we will also see that even those philosophers who hold Wittgenstein in the highest regard, are the first to acknowledge that such an approach falls short when it comes to saying anything about issues of practical philosophy (Hacker, 2015, p.51). What I want to establish in these opening chapters is that, what we will call the 'Wittgensteinian' approach to the nature of philosophy touches on two valuable insights into the nature of philosophy (its *origins* or source and the nature of its questions) but that it falls short by overlooking a legitimate philosophical area of enquiry (i.e. practical philosophy).

Chapter 2: A Unique Response to An Ineffable Wonder

Earlier I briefly mentioned that philosophy can be thought of etymologically as the love of wisdom. What exactly this philosophical 'wisdom' entails will hopefully become clear over the course of this paper. However, most people would likely agree that wisdom, at least in everyday language, implies first and foremost some kind of knowledge. And, when we think

of knowledge and its expansion, the sciences immediately spring to mind. Mathematics, biology, physics, and chemistry, these are the fundamental ways by which we conventionally approach the accumulation of knowledge. But, if wisdom implies a certain kind of knowledge, and if the accumulation of knowledge is the domain of the sciences, then what is there left for philosophy to do or to be? Surely it is safe for us to assume that philosophy is not just a pseudonym for the empirical sciences, and, proceeding under this assumption, we must in turn assume that the kind of knowledge which philosophy is concerned with accumulating is of a different kind than that which the sciences are concerned with, and that its contribution towards wisdom differs accordingly as well. It should come as no surprise then that, of the few philosophers who have dedicated a significant portion of their attention to matters of metaphilosophy, several have attempted to clarify what philosophy is by way of juxtaposing it with science (Wittgenstein, Waismann, Hacker). This is the first step in a Wittgensteinian approach to philosophy.

Waismann, who was a contemporary of Wittgenstein and whose views were significantly influenced by him, argues that philosophy "is very unlike science; and this in three respects: in philosophy there are no proofs; there are no theorems; and there are no questions which can be decided, Yes or No." (Waismann, 1968, p.1). Now, this may sound like three separate points of argument, and they do indeed each have their nuances, however, they all boil down to one thing: unlike the sciences, philosophy is not concerned with establishing facts. It is facts that can be proven true or false, it is theorems that can explain these facts more or less accurately, and it is only questions of fact which can be decided Yes or No. All of this is within the domain of the sciences, not of philosophy. Peter Hacker, one of the few contemporary authorities on Wittgenstein, echoes this sentiment:

> "Philosophy is not a natural science. There is no body of philosophical facts, on the model of facts of physics. There is no body of well-established philosophical truths, on the model of the truths of chemistry. There are no philosophical theories on the model of theories in the natural sciences that can be or have been confirmed by experiment and observation. Philosophy, unlike the hard sciences, issues no predictions. Philosophical reasoning, unlike scientific reasoning, involves no idealizations of observable phenomena for theoretical purposes and formulations of laws of nature. There are no hypotheses in philosophy that may be confirmed or disconfirmed by an experiment. Nor can philosophy tolerate approximations to the facts. For philosophy is not concerned with discovering laws of nature or with determining the facts." (Hacker, 2015, p.43).

Of course, this is not to say that philosophy ignores facts or acts as if there were none. It is simply to point out that it isn't concerned with their establishment, grounding, explanation or discovery like the sciences are. We established earlier that wisdom entails the accumulation of some kind of knowledge. In this sense, we could say that the sciences are concerned with contributing to wisdom by way of empirical, fact-based knowledge about our world, whereas philosophy does so by some other means.

So if philosophy is unlike science in that it does not concern itself with achieving wisdom by way of accumulating factual or empirical knowledge about how the world is, then what is it that philosophy is, and through what sort of knowledge does it purport to pursue wisdom? In attempting to answer this the Wittgensteinian approach illuminates the first major element of the nature of philosophy: its origin. Any philosopher will tell you that at the very least part of what keeps him or her committed to engaging in philosophy is an intense and incessant feeling of *wonder* towards the world around them. It is a reaction to the strangeness that saturates the world we live in. "From Plato to Schopenhauer philosophers are agreed that the source of their philosophizing is wonder" (Waismann, 1968, p.3). But, surely wonder is not unique to the philosopher? Surely it would be just as fair to say that scientists (of whatever variety) are also motivated towards knowledge by an intense wonder at the strangeness of the whole business and an ache to understand it. After all, it is unlikely that quantum physicists engage in their field of study because they find the fact that two particles can exist in several places at the same time anything other than fascinating. Nor is it likely that historians and anthropologists look upon the mysteries of the human past with disenchantment. In every case, no matter the discipline, the pattern of wonder playing a catalysing role in the investigations of our world holds analogously. So what is it that sets philosophical wonder apart from scientific kinds of wonder? I would argue that the answer lies as much in the kind of wonder that is at stake, as it does in the mode of reaction to this wonder. In both cases, there are fundamental differences between the scientist and the philosopher.

Chapter 3: Philosophical Wonder

With regards to the first point it seems that the kind of wonder which animates the philosopher is one which is not alleviated through philosophical investigation or contemplation. In fact, it is not alleviated at all. This is what marks it apart from the kind of wonder which scientist are motivated by. Through scientific investigation, theorizing, hypothesising and explanation of empirical facts, the scientist makes progress in the sense that something he

wonders about today, he may come to understand tomorrow, and wonder about no longer. This applies in two senses. First, it applies for the overall body of human scientific knowledge: until only recently, we could only wonder and hypothesize about what a black hole looked like. Now, for the first time, science has given us a photograph (Bennett, 2019). And, in so doing, some of the wonder regarding black holes seems to have fleeted along with the mystery. Just like how a cliff-hanger in a film or television series will never be as suspenseful the second time around, scientific wonder spurs scientific progress which to a degree alleviates the wonder that first initiated it. It is true that we may still wonder what black holes are and how they work even now that we have a picture to look at, but the point stands that it may just be a matter of time before scientific discovery also renders these matters no more wondrous than flight in a plane is to the experienced flyer. The second way in which this applies is in terms of individual or personal scientific progress or education. I can wonder how the cell works today, spend time studying the body of established biological knowledge tomorrow, and (perhaps not the day after, but soon) come to understand the interactions of organelles and the proteins that allow them to function. This may bring up new areas of wonder for me (i.e. what are organelles and proteins and how do they work respectively), but, what is important to realise here is that the original wonder which moved me to my scientific investigations (wonder at the workings of a cell) seems to be abatable by these very investigations.

This is not the case when it comes to philosophy, and the Wittgensteinian approach to philosophy is quick to recognise this fundamental difference in the nature of philosophical wonder. Unlike what we have considered regarding the wonder that invites scientific inquiry, the kind of wonder which affects the philosopher is characteristically incessant. No matter how much philosophical investigation is conducted, it maintains its wondrousness. This is why many young philosophers may at first be disappointed by philosophy; they expect to be provided with answers by the great philosophers that they study, when in reality they come to see that what they are really studying is the true depth of the wondrousness of the questions themselves. As Waismann puts it, “in looking at [philosophical] questions, it seems as if the mind’s eye were growing dim and as if everything, even that which ought to be absolutely clear, was becoming oddly puzzling and unlike its usual self” (Waismann, 1968, p.3). A convenient way to visualise what I mean by this philosophical kind of wonder is by analogy to semantic satiation.

Semantic satiation is a phenomenon (which we have doubtless all encountered at one time or another) which refers to the strange “loss of meaning or a reduction in the effectiveness of verbal material following its continued overt repetition or its prolonged visual fixation” (Kaningo and Lamber, 1963, p. 421). In other words, it is what tends to happen when you repeat

a word out loud or stare at a written word long enough that the word (with which you have been familiar for years and made use of countless times in everyday communication) begins to look or sound like gibberish and takes on a bizarre and eerily unfamiliar air. This can happen equally with complex, multisyllabic words as with simple monosyllabic ones.

Take the word 'zebra' for example. Virtually every native English speaker will tell you that this is a word which they have seen for almost as long as they can remember (even before they could read or write) as it often plays a starring role as the chosen example for the letter 'Z' in infant alphabet picture books ('Z is for Zebra!'). It is safe to say then that 'zebra' is a word with which people who have a good hold of the English language are familiar. Nevertheless, if such a native speaker were to utter 'zebra' aloud repetitively or stare at its written form for a time, as I would ask you to do now, its meaning seems to melt away and we seem to be left with a confounding strangeness. You begin to ask yourself whether this is really a word at all (even though you know very well that it is). You know full well that this is a word, you know what it means, you know how to use it, how to pronounce it, and how to spell it, and yet, you still become overwhelmed with the unsettling feeling that there is something intensely peculiar about this combination of lines or sounds. In such cases, no amount of studying linguistics or semantics will alleviate this feeling. This is the kind of wonder that plagues the philosopher. There are clear and consistent parallels between the phenomenological content of semantic satiation and philosophical wonder. The wonder that affects and animates philosophers is intense from its onset and it often intensifies upon investigation. Just as with semantic satiation, in philosophy, the more you contemplate the things which wonder you, the more their wondrousness and virtual incomprehensibility reveals itself. Perhaps this is part of the answer to the question I raised in the introduction about why it is that the more I study philosophy the less I feel that I know. It is because the nature of philosophical wonder is that the more it is scrutinized, the more it reveals its wondrousness in an almost kaleidoscopic fashion.

Waismann, quite astutely, says that "we all have our moments when something quite ordinary suddenly strikes us as queer […]. Not that we are often in this frame of mind; but on some occasions, when we look at things in a certain way, unexpectedly they seem to change as though by magic: they stare at us with a puzzling expression, and we begin to wonder whether they can possibly be the things we have known all our lives." (Waismann, 1968, p.4). This echoes my aforementioned observation regarding the phenomenology of philosophical wonder, and how it is causally related to the emergence of philosophical thought. "What gives rise to [philosophy] is nothing recondite and rare but precisely those things which stare us in the face: memory, motion, general ideas" (Waismann, 1968, p.3). Or, as Hacker puts it when he lists

some of Wittgenstein's own principles of philosophy, "philosophy has no subject matter of its own – in the manner in which the natural social and human sciences have a subject matter of their own" (Hacker, 2015, p.45). This is to say that pretty much anything can espouse philosophical wonder. Again, the Wittgensteinian tradition seems to support the observations borne out in the above consideration of semantic satiation as an analogue for philosophical wonder.

Waismann offers an example which relates to an issue more conventionally thought of as being 'philosophical' than semantic satiation and which may more directly illustrate the character of philosophical wonder. Looking briefly at the passage in which he formulates this example will help to both clarify and reinforce the above Wittgensteinian observations regarding the nature of philosophical wonder.

> "To bring out what seems to be peculiar to these [philosophical] questions one might say that they are not so much questions as tokens of a profound uneasiness of mind. Try for a moment to put yourself into the frame of mind of which Augustine was possessed when he asked: How is it possible to measure time? […] The past can't be measured, it is gone; the future can't be measured, it is not yet here; and the present can't be measured, it has no extension. Augustine knew of course how time is measured and this was not his concern. What puzzled him was how it was *possible* to measure time, seeing that the past hour cannot be lifted out and placed alongside the present hour for comparison" (Waismann, 1968, p.3).

Here we clearly see that Waismann, in keeping with the Wittgensteinian tradition, notes many of the same characteristics of philosophical wonder as I pointed out earlier: The philosophical breed of wonder often sprouts from things which, in the every day, seem unremarkable; it catalyses philosophy by revealing the oddness of the world to us; the more we examine whatever the object of this wonder is the more its wondrousness is revealed and its complexity intensified; and, no amount of scientific or empirical inquiry is able to abate this wonder through explanation or representation.

Chapter 4: The Philosophical Response to Wonder

Philosophy is Conceptual Clarification

I noted earlier that the answer to what sets philosophical wonder apart from the scientific variety lies as much in the kind of wonder that is at play, as it does in the mode of reaction to this wonder. I have so far settled the first matter, outlining some of the major characteristics of

said philosophical wonder. Indeed, Waismann's Wittgensteinian treatment of the strangeness of time has borne out these ideas regarding the nature of philosophical wonder. But, the aforementioned passage also lends important insight into the second matter. In a nutshell, it shows that philosophy differs fundamentally from science in how it responds to its catalysing emotion (wonder) in that it consists, not in answering yes or no questions via theorems and hypotheses, but in clarifying concepts.

What does this mean? It means, first of all, that the scientist differs from the philosopher in that he is able to, and does via explanatory theorems, respond to things which wonder him in a manner which allows them to eventually become settled in his mind. The scientist is able to investigate questions in such a way that they eventually cease to bother him, freeing him up to address the next question. The philosopher does not enjoy this luxury, at least not in the same sense. A philosophical response to philosophical wonder (which as we have seen only intensifies upon scrutiny) consists in navigating, familiarising oneself with, or mapping out this wonder. Trying to look for yes or no answers, theories and hypotheses to address philosophical questions born from philosophical wonder would be futile, because it is not in the nature of philosophical questions born of innately unyielding philosophical wonder to be answerable in any conventional sense that a scientist would readily recognise. Therefore, the philosopher does not pick sides in any particular argument because doing so would require him to put forward and defend certain theories and facts, which is not his role (as I noted earlier, this is the role of the scientist). Instead, the philosopher's role is to scrutinise and *describe* both sides of the argument, as well as the question being posed itself, and to make clear what everyone is really saying.

In other words, the philosopher is concerned with confronting the wondrousness of certain questions and ideas by pinning down what exactly it is that someone means when they, for example, use the words 'time' and 'measure' when they ask 'How is it possible to measure time?' This is because, as Wittgenstein purported, a single word can refer to several different concepts (i.e. What does 'horse' mean? A single particular horse? Any horse? All the horses that exist? (Waismann, 1968, p.3)). Therefore, when a question like 'How can time be measured?', or rather, 'How is it possible that time can be measured?' reveals itself to be a philosophical problem rooted in the sticky philosophical wonder I outlined earlier, the philosophical response is to pedantically try to clarify the concepts being referred to in the question, in the hopes that some semblance of clarity might ensue.

Translated back into terms of the pursuit of wisdom, philosophy contributes to wisdom by pursuing knowledge about the complexity of philosophical wonder, and it does this primarily

(according to the Wittgensteinian approach) through the clarification of concepts. With reference to the earlier example of time, Waismann illustrates this fundamentally Wittgensteinian idea regarding the nature of philosophy by arguing that the philosopher ought not to "ask what time is but how the *word* 'time' is being used" in each instance (Waismann, 1968, p.6). In other words, the philosopher does not try to *explain* time, he *describes* what the word 'time' might mean. What concept of 'time' is it that we are referring to when we ask what it is, or say that it has elapsed, or that it is relative, and so on? Are we, in each of these instances, referring to the same thing, or are there different senses of 'time', distinct concepts, which happen to share the same name, and which are causing us confusion?

> "[Time] appears to us a curious thing […]. 'Time flows' we say – a natural and innocent expression, and yet one pregnant with danger […]. To ask with what speed time moves, i.e. to ask how quickly time changes in time, is to ask the unaskable. […] How odd: time flows at the same rate and yet without speed; and perhaps even without anything to occur in it. The expression is puzzling in another way. 'I can never catch myself being in the past or in the future'[…]; 'whenever I think or perceive or breathe the word "now", I am in the present; therefore I am always in the present.' […] [D]oes it make sense to ask, 'At what time is the present moment?' Yes, no doubt; but how *can* it, if the 'now' is but the fixed point from which the dating of any event ultimately receives sense? So [the philosopher] is pulled to and fro: 'I am always in the present, yet it slips through my fingers; I am going forward in time – no, I am carried down the stream.' […] 'What a queer thing time must be', he may say to himself with a puzzled look on his face, 'what after all *is* time?' […] As we all know what time is, and yet cannot say what it is, it feels mystifying; and precisely because of its elusiveness it catches our imagination. The more we look at it the more we are puzzled: it seems charged with paradoxes." (Waismann, 1968, p.4-6).

It is the job of the philosopher to attempt to resolve these paradoxes by asking questions such as those contained in the passage above. It is the philosophers job to dig through the conventional language which is used to talk about such matters, and to find out what exactly everyone is saying.

What is the conceptual content of the word 'time' that makes it strange that it is possible that it can be measured? What is the conceptual content of the word 'measure' which makes it strange that it should be applied to a concept such as 'time'? Do we mean 'measure' here in the same way in which we mean it when we say that height or weight can be 'measured'? Do we

mean by ‘time’ the kind of time which we measure on a watch, i.e. a portion of the time it takes for the earth to go around the sun? Do we mean the fourth dimension? Do we mean our own sense of the passing of time? And so on. This is the only manner in which the philosopher can attempt to make any kind of progress. A good philosopher will not be one who can give satisfying answers to big questions like ‘What is time?’ or ‘How is it possible that time can be measured?’. A good philosopher will be one who is able to pose the right questions in response and who has insights regarding what *exactly* these questions mean. In other words, what exactly is it about the concepts that make up the question which makes them seem so strange and unanswerable? This is what philosophy aims to create a detailed map of, and what allows philosophers to navigate the intricacies of the conceptual underpinnings of whatever philosophical question is being posed.

All the philosopher can do, and indeed what lies at the heart of philosophy (from the Wittgensteinian perspective), is to plot the wondrousness of different matters on a metaphorical map. In some cases, by doing this the philosopher is able to disentangle the conceptual content of the question or problem at hand so as to reframe it in clearer terms which resolve the philosophical problem outright. This is because, in many cases, the wondrousness of a philosophical problem is the result of a confusion of concepts brought about by imprecise wording (or grammar, as Wittgenstein would call it). In such cases, it is the philosopher, who notices and is drawn in by the strangeness of philosophical problems, who is most well equipped to engage in the necessary clarification. In the words of Waismann, “a philosophic question is not solved: it *dissolves*. And in what does the ‘dissolving’ consist? In making the meaning of the words used in putting the question so clear to ourselves that we are released from the spell it casts on us” (Waismann, 1968, p.10).

It is part of the philosopher’s job to root out questions that “are not real questions asking for information but ‘muddles felt as problems’ (Wittgenstein) which wither away when the ground is cleared” (Waismann, 1968, p.13). Philosophy, therefore, responds to philosophical wonder by trying to grasp its full conceptual complexity, breadth and depth. In the best case scenario, such clarification resolves (or dissolves) philosophical problems by disentangling them, in the worst case scenario, we are left with a clearer view of the extent of and the reasons for the incomprehensibility of the remaining genuinely wondrous philosophical problems.

In the words of Wittgenstein himself, “[p]hilosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything” (Wittgenstein, 1989, p.50e). Or, in the words of Hacker, “there is no philosophical knowledge – comparable to the knowledge achieved in the sciences. Philosophy is not part of the quest for knowledge of the world. The philosopher is not

a citizen of the republic of ideas. Philosophy is an activity of conceptual clarification the purpose of which is to resolve philosophical problems" (Hacker, 2015, p.45).

This brings out a further characteristic of the nature of philosophy, namely, that it is not a particularly comfortable or conventionally satisfying endeavour. As Waismann points out:

> "The philosopher as he ponders over some such problem has the appearance of a man who is deeply disquieted. He seems to be straining to grasp something which is beyond his powers. The words in which such a question presents itself do not quite bring out into the open the real point – which may, perhaps more aptly, be described as the recoil from the incomprehensible." (Waismann, 1968, p.3).

The philosopher has little recourse when the problems and questions he is interested in addressing contain within their very nature an element of incomprehensibility. Indeed, the only recourse he does have is to try to explore and map the incomprehensibility itself and the concepts in which it consists. As Hacker puts it, "[w]hereas mathematics is concept-formation by means of proof construction, philosophy is concept-clarification by means of description. What philosophy describes are the logical relations of implication, exclusion, compatibility, presupposition, point and purpose, role and function among propositions in which a given problematic expression occurs." (Hacker, 2015, p.45). And, as a result, the philosopher must set aside any hopes for the big satisfying answers which likely enticed him into philosophy to begin with, accepting instead that the best he can hope for is to become familiar with the conceptual intricacies of these big questions, and that these observations will help guide him towards a new, ever-evolving, way of understanding or looking at them.

Conceptual Clarification is Questioning, Not Arguing

The final major characteristic of philosophy which the Wittgensteinian approach bears out pertains to the proper method by which such concept clarification ought to be conducted, i.e. the manner in which the concept clarification which lies at the heart of philosophy should be engaged in. The first thing that the Wittgensteinian approach to philosophy points out in this regard is that the clarification of concepts is most effectively and most appropriately conducted primarily, not by coercive debate, but by pedantic and meticulous questioning.

> "[…] we don't *force* our interlocutor. We leave him free to choose, accept or reject any way of using his words. He may depart from ordinary usage […] if it is only in this way that he can explain himself. […] The only thing [the philosopher] insist[s] upon is that he should be aware of what he is doing. If we strictly adhere to this

> method – going over the argument, asking him at each step whether he is willing to use an expression in a certain way, if not, offering him alternatives, but leaving the decision to him and only pointing out what their consequences are—no disputes can arise. […] This would be the true way of doing philosophy undogmatically" (Waismann, 1968, p.12).

The conceptual clarification which the Wittgensteinian position sees as key to the nature of philosophy, is therefore, primarily engaged in through inquiry, not through argument. The philosopher may have his opinions regarding the conceptual content of the word 'time' in varying contexts, but he doesn't *argue* his position. Instead, he attempts to lead the interlocutor and himself towards a deeper understanding of the matter at hand by guiding him through a re-examination his own position, allowing him to reach his own conclusions. The conceptual clarification which lies at the heart of philosophy is, in this sense, inherently inquisitive, not argumentative. It challenges ideas not with competing ideas, but with questions. Indeed, "the genius of the philosopher shows itself nowhere more strikingly than in the new kind of question he brings into the world. What distinguishes him and gives him his place is the passion of questioning" (Waismann, 1968, p.16).

The second observation that the Wittgensteinian approach offers on the matter of how conceptual clarification ought to be carried out follows on from the first. It pertains to the notion of philosophical argumentation and its place in the prime directive of philosophy (clarifying concepts). While it was pointed out in the previous paragraph that conceptual clarification is primarily to be engaged in by way of questioning and not by way of arguing, there is still a place for what might be called argumentative strategies in philosophy. Rather than being argumentation in favour of empirical proofs or refutations of one explanation over another, philosophic argumentation "[…] *builds up a case.* First, [the philosopher] makes you see all the weaknesses, disadvantages, shortcomings of a position; he brings to light inconsistencies in it or points out how unnatural some of the ideas underlying the whole theory are by pushing them to their farthest consequences" (Waismann, 1968, p.30). This is where the rigorous conceptual questioning which was mentioned in earlier paragraphs takes place. But, the philosopher goes further. "[H]e [also] offers you a new way of looking at things not exposed to those objections. In other words, he submits to you, like a barrister, all the facts of his case, and you are in the position of a judge" (Waismann, 1968, p.30). This means that the Wittgensteinian position does indeed allow for the philosopher to state *a case.* What is important however is that the philosopher does not state his case in the form of an argument.

This is where the argumentative, or better said, *propositional* aspects of philosophic concept clarification are accounted for by the Wittgensteinian approach to philosophy. Once the questioning has shown that there are holes in the way we are using our language, the philosopher attempts to put forward new ways of looking at any particular matter (whether it be the nature of time, free will, or anything else) which avoid the problems that his questioning exposed in his interlocutor's position. This is ultimately what all great philosophical works from ancient times through to the 21st century, from Thales and Anaximander to de Beauvoir and Rawls, have done. They may have differed in area of interest, but what all distinguished philosophical works have in common is that each of them follows a two step program. First, they expose, in one way or another, the weaknesses, disadvantages and shortcomings of the preeminent positions that preceded them. Second, they put forward a new way of looking at the matters that concern them and propose new ways of approaching or conceptualising age old questions that have baffled people throughout the ages; new ways of describing problems rather than explanations of how to solve them. This is what I mean when I say that the questioning which is integral to conceptual clarification involves some argumentation as well.

Of course, most of these works have an argumentative element to them. The difference, however, between the type of argumentation which the philosopher engages in and what comes to mind when we think of an 'argument', is that philosophers are not trying to convince anyone of anything. What all great philosophers are doing in their works when they make a certain case is offering these propositions up for judgment, not attempting to defend or push them upon anyone. They ask only that the new ways of thinking which they are proposing be considered, and not just considered, but questioned and challenged in return, with the same degree of vigour which bore these new ways of thinking in the first place. This is the nature of philosophical progress, an endless and cyclical process following (roughly) the following formula: 1. Exposing weaknesses in orthodox or contemporary ways of thinking about any given philosophical problem through conceptual clarification carried out by way, not of argument, but of rigorous questioning; → 2. *Proposing* (rather than arguing for) a new way of thinking which avoids the weaknesses exposed in step 1; → 3. Beginning the process anew by subjecting this new way of thinking to the rigours of step 1; and so on.

So, all in all, what is it that we have gathered about the nature of philosophy from the Wittgensteinian approach? First of all, I have shown how the Wittgensteinian approach makes clear that, at many levels, philosophy differs fundamentally from other kinds of inquiry, most notably the sciences. Secondly, I have shown that it bears out a particular kind of wonder, which is unique in its persistence, as the origin of or catalyst for philosophical thought. Thirdly, we

have learned that the primary characteristic of philosophy is that it responds to the wonder which catalyses it, not by looking for answers, but by trying to contribute to wisdom by way of disentangling the conceptual content of problems, mapping out the incomprehensible, so to speak. The philosopher does not provide the answers; he clarifies the questions by making explicit the concepts of which they consist, and, he does so dialectically.

Chapter 5: What About Practical Philosophy?

This is all well and good. But, it may at this point have become obvious that such a view of philosophy, while comprehensive and difficult to fault, leaves us with an uncomfortably rigid and constrained description of what philosophy is. It puts forward a view of philosophy as the highly theoretical, bordering on esoteric, endeavour which attempts to address wonder by clarifying the conceptual fabric of the world that gives rise to it. Granted, I do not dispute any of the observations that have been pointed out by the Wittgensteinian approach. Indeed, as I have argued, I firmly believe that they strike at the heart of what philosophy is. Nevertheless, there seems to be something missing. Surely philosophy is more than just abstract thought about conceptual confusions brought about by everyday language, done for its own sake, and with little to no bearing on the everyday lives of the average person.

Perhaps the greatest flaw in the Wittgensteinian approach, as it has been presented thus far, is that it seems to leave unaddressed an entire branch of inquiry which most people are likely to also have in mind when they ask ‘What is philosophy?’. Indeed, I am not the first to make note of this apparent gap in the Wittgensteinian approach to the nature of philosophy. As Hacker puts it, “an important limitation on Wittgenstein’s conception of philosophy [is that] [i]t was geared to the branches of philosophy that concerned him, namely what Kant called “theoretical” (in contrast to “practical”) philosophy. Wittgenstein had no interest whatsoever in legal and political philosophy, let alone in philosophical investigations into economics and economic reasoning” (Hacker, 2015, p.51). So, what we have seen in the Wittgensteinian observations made so far has been a convincing, but incomplete account of philosophy; one that has been presented through the lens of theoretical philosophy, and which therefore does not disallow, so much as it omits, matters of practical philosophy.

If one were to take a wild guess at the distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy one might, understandably, start by saying that practical philosophy is, as the name suggests, ‘doing’ philosophy. But, this would be inaccurate, or at least not specific enough, as it would imply that the theoretical philosopher does not ‘do’ philosophy. As we saw in chapters

two and three, philosophy, is, at its heart, the clarification of concepts, and clarifying concepts is indisputably something which one *does*. "Philosophy is not a theory, or a doctrine, but rather […] an activity of clarification (of thoughts), and more so, of critique (of language)" (Biletzki & Matar, 2018). Therefore, the difference between practical and theoretical philosophy must (and I argue does) lie, not in the fact that the practical philosopher practices philosophy while the theoretical philosopher does not, but in *how* they do philosophy, or rather, in what context.

In short, what sets the theoretical philosopher apart from the practical philosopher is that the theoretical philosopher attempts to disentangle philosophical problems through conceptual clarification (as we saw above) in a purely speculative setting whereas the practical philosopher does so in a more 'applied' setting. In other words, practical philosophy concerns itself with applying philosophical thinking (the clarification of concepts and problems) to issues that impact people in their everyday lives, doing philosophy for the sake of effecting positive change in the world and in one's life. Theoretical philosophy, on the other hand, focuses on more abstract issues, doing philosophy for its own sake, if you will.

As a result, theoretical philosophers and practical philosophers tend to focus on different areas of inquiry. Theoretical philosophers focus primarily on rather abstract questions akin to those we saw earlier regarding the nature of time. Other examples of issues that might interest the theoretical philosopher include free will, the mind, possible worlds, knowledge and belief, mental states, intentionality etc. For the most part, these are the issues which are generally seen as being under the purview of metaphysics, epistemology, logic and aesthetics. The practical philosopher, on the other hand, is more interested in using philosophical methods of conceptual clarification to effect real, tangible, change in the world. Theoretical and practical philosophy are both *done*, but only practical philosophy is *lived.* Put differently, we can think of practical philosophy as those branches of philosophy that try to apply philosophical processes (i.e. concept clarification) not to the orthodoxies of esoteric theoretical matters, but to the orthodoxies of our value systems, our societies and our cultures.

As a result, the practical philosopher is often interested in matters which directly concern the average person and which the majority of people are likely to have an opinion on (which can hardly be said for issues like temporal ontology and epistemic intentionality). By and large, such matters fall under the umbrella of what is conventionally referred to as moral or ethical philosophy and are to do with normative issues like legal, political, economic and personal value systems. How ought we to live our lives? How ought societies to be organised economically, legislatively, and politically? What ethical responsibilities do we have to our environment, each other and future generations? An exhaustive list is not possible here, but I

believe these examples suffice to give a general idea of how the practical philosopher's areas of interest have applied dimensions which impact the world in which we live on a level that the matters of theoretical philosophy do not speak to.

Of course, it is true that matters conventionally associated with the practical philosopher can be approached in a theoretical manner. For example, the theoretical philosopher may very well be interested in investigating the nature of normativity, or of evil, or of 'right' and 'wrong'. Equally, matters traditionally approached from a theoretical standpoint, like those to do with the nature of free will, for example, can be legitimate subjects of contemplation for the practical philosopher as well. The difference is that the theoretical philosopher will be interested in these ideas and questions for their own sake and for the sake of the wonder which emanates from them, whereas the practical philosopher will constantly be trying to find out how best to *apply* what he learns to the world around him and to his everyday life. Suffice to say that when people ask 'What is philosophy?', they are usually referring not only to the branches of philosophy which concern themselves with esoteric metaphysical questions, but also to branches of philosophy which are to do with practical questions of 'applying philosophy to the real world', so to speak. And, it is clear that the Wittgensteinian account of philosophy which I considered earlier privileges considerably the theoretical side of philosophy over practical and applied questions. Therefore, if we want to come to a more well rounded understanding of what philosophy, in both its theoretical and its practical dimensions, is, we will have to look further than just to the Wittgensteinian views.

Part 2: Socrates' Paradox, His Method and Practical Philosophy

Chapter 6: Why Socrates?

So far, I have laid out the broad strokes of what a Wittgensteinian approach to philosophy has to say regarding the nature of the pursuit of wisdom. In so doing, it has also become clear that practical philosophy is problematically absent from such an account. I will now argue that, when it comes to clarifying the nature of practical philosophy, we can look to the original philosopher, Socrates, for answers. In order to do this, I would like to, for now, set to one side the Wittgensteinian observations I have made thus far regarding the nature of philosophy while I outline the most important elements of Socrates' view of philosophy. Once I have outlined the most pertinent aspects of the Socratic position, I will return to these Wittgensteinian principles to show that there are clear parallels between the two approaches, which supports

my suspicion that they compliment each other, or, at the very least, are compatible with one another. I will then go on to make explicit how, in addition to this compatibility, the Socratic position fills in the gaps left open by the Wittgensteinian approach in that it offers more insight into the nature of the practical dimensions of philosophy.

Anyone who has spent time busying themselves with the study of Socrates will tell you that perhaps the biggest obstacle to doing so is that we have no surviving written works which can be attributed to Socrates. Indeed, most of what we know about him and his positions we must extract from later writers who purport to be representing his views, the most notable among these being Plato. We will never know for sure what Socrates said, what he thought, or what he argued. However, for the purposes of this paper, it is not especially important who said what. As was the case when it came to the Wittgensteinian approach, whether or not it was really a man named 'Socrates' who held the views which I am about to put forward for consideration is irrelevant. What is important are the ideas themselves, and the fact that they have much to offer when it comes to making clear the nature of philosophy from a practical perspective. I will therefore be drawing primarily from Plato's accounts of Socrates' views in what follows, as he was the closest thing we have to a published contemporary of the man. I will refer to these ideas as 'Socratic'.

Now that this is cleared up I will make some preliminary remarks regarding what it is exactly that the Socratic account of philosophy is able to tell us about the nature of practical philosophy. The most important thing that I hope the ensuing discussion will show is that the Socratic Paradox ('I know that I know nothing'), and more specifically, its implications, strike at the very heart of what practical philosophy is while, at the same time, echoing many of the observations made earlier by the Wittgensteinian approach regarding the nature of philosophy more generally.

Chapter 7: Socrates' Apology and His Paradox

Perhaps some of the most fascinating, and, when it comes to the issue of describing the nature of philosophy from a practical perspective, insightful, Platonic accounts of Socrates' life are those which record his trial and eventual execution by the Athenian citizenry on the charge of "'corrupting the young and not believing in the gods the city believes in, but in other new divinities' (24b-c)" (Rowe in Plato, 2010, p.118). The reason these accounts are so integral to the Socratic approach to philosophy is because, in his defence against these charges, Socrates

lays out what may be some of the most fundamental aspects of how philosophy, more specifically, practical philosophy, should be understood.

Socrates' Charges

Let us begin by taking a closer look at the charge. In Socrates' own words, the most frightening of his accusers "are the ones who've been filling the ears of most of you [the Athenian public] since you were children and trying to convince you of something that's not the slightest bit truer than the rest: that there's a Socrates around who's an expert- one who dabbles in theories about the heavenly bodies, who's already searched out everything beneath the earth and who makes the weaker argument the stronger." (Plato, 2010, 18b-c). In other words, in Socrates' mind, his most insidious accusers see him as a dangerous, cult-like figure, a false prophet who claims to know better than the established Athenian order, and who professes to be an expert on all matters. Suffice it to say, it is not uncommon for cult leaders and false prophets to dispute these labels and their connotations. However, in Socrates' case, I believe his objections to these charges are not only genuine but also well grounded, for if anything, he is guilty of the very opposite of these accusations.

Socrates argues that he has "nothing to do with these things" (Plato, 2010, 19d), i.e. with "'[…]busying himself with research into what's beneath the earth and in the heavens and making the weaker argument the stronger and teaching the same things to others.'" (Plato, 2010, 19b-c). He sees any accusations to the contrary as not only profoundly slanderous, but also as being rooted in a fundamental misunderstanding of what he was trying to get across in his teachings. Admittedly, Socrates concedes from the onset that he does indeed believe that he "possess[es] a certain sort of wisdom" (Plato, 2010, 20d). However, he believes that this wisdom is of a very particular kind, and that it has been mischaracterised by his accusers in the charges which they have brought against him.

Let us spend some time looking at the most important aspects of Socrates' case for himself. Socrates begins by recounting that a friend of his, Chaerephon, once visited the oracle at Delphi and asked whether anyone was wiser than Socrates, to which the oracle promptly responded "that there was no one wiser" (Plato, 2010, 20e-21a). Upon first hearing of this, Socrates was taken aback, for he had "no knowledge of [his] being wise in any respect, great or small", making it a strange proposition that he should be the wisest of all men (Plato, 2010, 21b). How could he, someone who, by his own admission did not know much, if anything, of particular note, be worthy of the title of the wisest individual in the ancient world? With these

questions in mind, Socrates responded to the oracle's contention by putting it to the test. He went around Athens seeking out an audience with those who were considered most wise in the city, thereby hoping to find someone superior in wisdom to himself (which was a low bar considering he didn't believe he himself possessed any at all) and prove the oracle wrong (Plato, 2010, 21b-c). In his first encounter with such a purportedly wise man, Socrates met with an expert in politics, and after some conversation, he "formed the conclusion that, while this person seemed wise to lots of other people, and especially to himself, in reality he wasn't" (Plato, 2010, 21c). The encounters that followed, each with someone which was conventionally deemed to be even wiser than the last, unfolded analogously, leaving Socrates with three conclusions.

The Socratic Paradox

The first conclusion which Socrates drew from his examination of these experts was that in a paradoxical sense, he was indeed wiser than these people:

> "'I am actually wiser than this person; likely enough neither of us knows anything of importance, but he *thinks* he knows something when he doesn't, whereas just as I don't know anything, so I don't think I do, either. So I appear to be wiser, at least than him, in just this one small respect: that when I don't know things, I don't think that I do either.'" (Plato, 2010, 21d).

Failing to find someone wiser than himself among those with a reputation for wisdom, Socrates turned to the next best thing and approached anyone with a reputation for knowing anything. Considering that the only sliver of wisdom he did possess lay in his awareness of his own ignorance, finding someone who knew anything at all should therefore suffice to disprove the oracle. However, upon such inquiry he discovered that the trend persisted and that "those with the greatest reputations seemed to me, as I continued my divinely instigated search, practically the most deficient, while others who were supposedly inferior seemed better endowed when it came to good sense" (Plato, 2010, 22a).

For example, after questioning poets he questioned craftsmen, and found that while they did indeed know things which he didn't, and while they were indeed experts in their individual fields, this expertise made them think that they knew other things as well. One might imagine a stonemason who has spent decades perfecting the art of carving pillars out of stone. He is an expert when it comes to knowing which stones are best suited to which pillar designs, which stones are able to support the weight of which others, and the best ways in which to cut said

stones so as to minimise the amount of effort and waste while optimising the beauty of the final product. People recognise him as such and travel from near and far to seek his advice and wisdom regarding their own buildings. It is not unimaginable that the praise that such a stonemason would garner could eventually 'go to his head', so to speak, so that when people came to him seeking advice regarding stonemasonry he might also begin to offer advice on other matters. Matters which he has no business giving advice on. As a more contemporary example, some people might see this as what is happening when celebrities, who are often experts in whatever it is that made them famous, whether it be fashion design, acting, or technological innovation, begin to behave as if they believe themselves to be authorities on matters of economics, politics, and morality. They forget the bounds of their expertise. This is not to say that they are only entitled to opinions regarding their areas of expertise, it just means that people who are indeed experts on certain matters can sometimes become blind to their ignorance on other matters.

As Socrates himself puts it:

> "I knew that I myself had practically no knowledge, whereas I knew that I'd find them knowing lots of fine things. Nor was I mistaken about that. They did know things I didn't, and in that respect they were wiser than me. But, men of Athens, the good craftsmen too seemed to me to suffer from the same failing as the poets [and the wise men]: because they were accomplished in practising their skill, each one of them claimed to be wisest about other things too, the most important ones at that – and this error of theirs seemed to me to obscure the wisdom they did posses" (Plato, 2010, 22d).

This first point that Socrates makes about the nature of the wisdom that he purports to possess has conventionally become known as the Socratic Paradox. In a nutshell, the Socratic Paradox holds that true wisdom, or at least an important kind of wisdom, lies in awareness of the scope of one's ignorance and in accepting the axiom that: 'the only thing I know for sure is that I know nothing at all'. In other words, what the oracle meant when he said that Socrates was the wisest of all men, was that "human wisdom is worth very little, or nothing at all. And in mentioning this 'Socrates', he appears to be using my [Socrates'] name just to treat me as an illustration – as if he were to say 'The wisest among you, humans, is the one who like Socrates has recognized that in truth he's worth nothing when it comes to wisdom'" (Plato, 2010, 23a-b). I will return to this idea in a later chapter to show how it contributes fundamentally to an understanding of the practical dimensions of philosophy.

Uncomfortable Convictions

The second conclusion that Socrates deduces from the experiences he had while attempting to prove the oracle wrong is the fact that his revelations regarding the wisdom (or lack thereof) of those conventionally considered wise were intensely unpopular. In every case, any attempt to make his interlocutors entertain the notion that they only thought they were wise, was, unsurprisingly, met with ire. During his defence, Socrates makes this clear when he laments:

> "The result of my inquiry, then, men of Athens, has been that I have become an object of hatred for many people, and hatred of a particularly intractable and intolerable kind, which has brought about numerous slanders against me and given me that reputation of being *wise;* for on every occasion the onlookers suppose that if I refute someone else I must myself be an expert in whatever the discussion is about." (Plato, 2010, 23a).

In other words, then, Socrates sees part of the reason why his views have been so unpopular as having to do with a fundamental misinterpretation of his arguments. Namely, in his view, people have misunderstood him as arguing that he is all knowing, when really all he ever said was that those who purported to know the most were also those who knew least about the limits of their knowledge and true extent of their ignorance. Put differently, Socrates at no point in his conversations with those people of Athens who were considered to hold a measure of wisdom, argued that he knew better than these people in their respective areas of expertise. He simply noted that there was no way for them to be as sure as they claimed to be about what they knew.

The Socratic Method

This brings us to the third major point that Socrates makes in his appeal to his jury, namely, that the only thing he ever did was pose questions that people were unable to answer, or that exposed holes in their views which they had not, up until that point, noticed. This is how he became aware of the Socratic Paradox as well as how he went about attempting to demonstrate it to his interlocutors. This point is more implicit in Socrates' dialogue than the rest and builds on the earlier idea of the Socratic Paradox. Socrates never once, at any point in his time as a public figure, claimed to know *better* or *more* than those with whom he was conversing (as demonstrated by the Socratic Paradox). If this is not what he was doing when he challenged the experts on their respective areas of expertise; if he was, indeed, not challenging their knowledge by way of proposition of better or truer knowledge, then what was he doing?

Socrates purported to be exposing the lack of wisdom in his interlocutors, but it was not by way of offering stronger theses and hypotheses than their own. The key here lies in an earlier cited Socratic statement: "onlookers suppose that if I refute someone else I must myself be an expert in whatever the discussion is about" (Plato, 2010, 23a). It is by *refuting* the arguments of those who claim wisdom that Socrates shows that they are not as wise as they claim to be, not by making stronger arguments himself (as this would necessitate expertise which he, by his own admission, is not in possession of). In a later passage Socrates provides us with some more context for how he purports to conduct these refutations without any superior knowledge of his own on the particular matter at hand:

> "I have never, ever, been anybody's teacher; if anyone, young or old, wants to listen to me as I talk and do what I do, I've never begrudged it to anyone, nor do I talk to people if I get money for it but otherwise not. Instead, I offer myself to rich and poor alike, for them to ask their questions and, if anyone wishes, to listen to whatever I have to say and answer *my* questions." (Plato, 2010, 33a-b).

Socrates tells us that he is not, nor has he ever at any point been, anyone's *teacher.* We can infer from this that, when conversing with those who were considered by both themselves and others to be wise, he (as has already been noted) did not purport to have anything to teach in terms of their areas of expertise. Socrates did not claim to have anything to teach the poets about poetry, the politicians about politics, the craftsmen about their pottery, metalwork etc. He also tells us that, rather than this, what he does do is invite people to speak with him, to ask him questions, and to answer his questions. In other words, Socrates invites a particular sort of *conversation*. One that relies on a particular methodology but does not require mutual expertise on the matter at hand in order to occur. This method of conversation, which Socrates argues he does employ to the end of demonstrating the Socratic Paradox has, in the millennia since, become known as the Socratic Method. And, although Socrates does not go into great descriptive detail about how his individual conversations with the politicians, the poets, and the craftsmen unfolded, we can look to the way in which he interacts with his accusers during his defence as an example of the Socratic Method in action.

Meletus is Socrates' primary formal accuser, and therefore, he plays the role of the antagonist in Plato's account of Socrates' court proceedings. After making the general observations regarding his position and the Socratic Paradox clear, Socrates turns to Meletus, and challenges him on his accusations personally. In doing so, Socrates demonstrates the very particular way in which he engages in his philosophy via critical conversation, i.e. the Socratic Method. We will not have the time here to delve too deeply into Socrates' cross examination

of Meletus. However, this will not be an issue, because, at the moment, it is not the individual arguments which Socrates makes, but the way in which he presents them that interests us.

Consider, for instance, the following condensed version of a passage from the beginning of Socrates' cross examination of Meletus:

> "Here, Meletus, and tell me this: am I right in saying it's your first priority that the younger among us should be in the best possible condition?
>
> 'It is.'
>
> So come on, tell these people: who is it that makes them better? […]
>
> 'These people here, Socrates, the members of the jury.' […]
>
> All of them? Or just some of them, and not others?
>
> 'All of them.' […]
>
> What about the spectators over there […]?
>
> 'They do too.' […]
>
> In that case, Meletus, it seems that every single Athenian makes them into fine and upstanding people except for me; I alone corrupt them. […] Answer me this: does it seem to you to be like this with horses too? That it's all mankind that improves them, and just one person who corrupts them? Or is the situation quite the opposite of this, that there's one person or a very small number of people who can improve them, namely the horse-experts, whereas most people, if they even have anything to do with horses, or use them, actually make them worse? […] Yes indeed it is, […] because if there's one person and only one who corrupts our young men, while everyone else benefits them, it would be a great piece of good fortune in their case. But the fact is, Meletus, that your behaviour is sufficient demonstration of your total lack of concern for the young up till now; you clearly show your own negligence, and the fact that the things you're bringing me to court for aren't a meaningful subject for you at all." (Plato, 2010, 24c-25c).

The first thing to note is that the conversational tone is not simply a stylistic literary choice. It is a format which virtually all Socratic texts share because it strikes at the very heart of how Socrates conducted philosophy. We see that Socrates begins by asking Meletus if he agrees with his reconstruction of a part of Meletus' position. Indeed, at every step, Socrates stops to make sure that his interlocutor is still with him, and in agreement with how his arguments are being represented, so that he cannot later come back and say that Socrates is doing anything other than following the argument to its logical conclusions. In fact, the majority of the conversation seems to be made up of Socrates questioning Meletus, asking him whether

he would agree that each step in Socrates' reconstruction of his argument follows on from the last. Socrates then forces Meletus to acknowledge that, by his own logic (seeing as he agreed with each step so far) there are elements of his argument that are not consistent and that cannot hold, or that do not imply what he supposes they do. In other words, Socrates demonstrates that the method by which he conducts his inquiry does not consist in making new arguments of his own so much as it consists in exploring the argument that has been brought up against him, and finding ways in which it cannot be true, or in which it commits its proponents to conclusions which they do not hold.

Indeed, the rest of the *Apology* follows this format as well, with Socrates leading Meletus through his own argument, and exposing inconsistencies and contradictions along the way. We can therefore safely assume that when Socrates conducted his conversations with those considered by the city to be wise, and when he attempted to make them aware of the fact that they could not be as wise as they thought, he applied the same strategy. In the same way that Socrates here exposes Meletus' charges against him as disingenuous, Socrates also exposed those who were considered to be wise as being less than that. In other words, he shows that the Socratic Method consists in a conversational examination of the logical implications of any given view or theory. It consists in digging beneath the surface of such views by way of pedantic questioning, and in subsequently discovering hidden faux pas in reasoning which have thus far gone unnoticed, at all times making sure to avoid putting words in the mouths of those with whom one is speaking by offering them the opportunity to make corrections at each step.

Socrates' Defence

Taken together, these three arguments form the heart of Socrates' defence against the accusations of claiming to have already searched out everything beneath the earth and in the heavens (i.e. being an expert in all things), of 'making the weaker argument the stronger', and of teaching the same things to others, thereby corrupting the youth. First of all, as Socrates has demonstrated, he never claimed wisdom in the sense of possessing knowledge greater than those considered wise by the city. He claimed only to be in possession of wisdom in the sense that he was aware of his own ignorance and fallibility (i.e. the Socratic Paradox), something that the others, especially those who were considered *most* wise by conventional standards, tended to forget. How, then, could he be guilty of claiming himself to be an expert on all matters when the only message he ever did profess was that he knew nothing, and that others likely know less than they think? Indeed, he cannot be. In this way, Socrates shows himself to be

innocent of the charge of claiming to have already searched out everything beneath the earth and in the heavens, since the only thing he has ever claimed comes closer to the opposite (i.e. by his own admission he knows very little if anything about the things beneath the earth, in the heavens and everywhere in between).

The second and third parts of his argument follow on from the first in terms of how they prove his innocence. That is to say, they are implications of the Socratic Paradox. The second argument we considered (regarding the unpopularity of the Socratic Paradox) makes obvious the reason why Socrates was accused so slanderously of the aforementioned charges despite his relatively easily proven innocence. Socrates' message consists in exposing those considered by the city and by themselves to be wise as less than that. For obvious reasons, this made him unpopular. People who have become accustomed to a certain esteem often learn to covet it and are rarely keen to part with it. This, coupled with the relative ease with which Socrates' words can be twisted provide both motive and opportunity for his accusers to misrepresent Socrates' message by way of obscuring what he really meant by 'wisdom'. In this way, by addressing the fact that making people aware of the holes in their knowledge is a task that inspires animosity, Socrates strengthens his case.

As Socrates puts it:

> "the young ones follow me around, since they have all the leisure in the world – that is, the wealthiest of them, and they do it of their own accord, because they love hearing those fellows being put to the test; often they copy me amongst themselves, and then they go on to try out their technique by examining others, and I imagine that as a result they find a great superfluity of people who think they know something but actually know little or nothing. So the next thing is that their victims get angry with me instead of with themselves, and talk about some quite abominable Socrates who corrupts the young" (Plato, 2010, 23c-d).

Here we see, not only that Socrates is innocent, but why and how his accusers have managed to fabricate their charges against him without having them dismissed from the onset. It also makes even more evident that Socrates is not guilty of professing omniscience and divine wisdom, but rather of asking questions which supposedly 'wise' people were unable to answer, and inspiring others to do the same (actions which are not listed under the charges brought against him).

This brings us on to the third point we saw Socrates make earlier (concerning the Socratic Method). Once again, this point is testament to Socrates' innocence as it reinforces the fact that he cannot be guilty of claiming to have searched out all things beneath the earth and in the

heavens and teaching these things to others. As was demonstrated, Socrates does not put forward any theories, arguments, or lofty truths of his own, and he does not claim any expert knowledge. All he does is critically test the logical integrity of the theories, arguments, lofty truths and expert knowledge that others put forward, primarily by way of questioning. Socrates is simply someone who, by employing a particular dialectical method of questioning (i.e. the Socratic Method), is able to expose faults in ideas which others have not yet noticed, and who, in so doing, inspires others to be similarly critical and sceptical of those who profess to be wise. Considering this, Socrates cannot be guilty of claiming divine knowledge in contradiction to all the established norms of Athens, and of corrupting its youth by teaching these heretical ideas to them.

So, why have I bothered to go on this tangent into Plato's accounts of Socrates' dialogues? What was the purpose of this digression into the roots of the Socratic Paradox, the Socratic Method, and the ire and persecution that they can inspire? There are three major reasons, which I will now investigate in the remainder of this paper. First of all, as may already have become apparent, Socrates' ideas seem to bear striking similarities to some of those put forward earlier by the Wittgensteinian approach to the nature of philosophy, suggesting parallels which are well worth exploring. Secondly, the Socratic Paradox and the Socratic Method, taken together, offer a take on philosophy that offers us more in the way of clarifying the nature of practical philosophy (an area in which the Wittgensteinian approach fell short). Thirdly, the account of Socrates' arrest, charge, and execution are allegorical and point to some of the very tangible consequences that can ensue from a misunderstanding of what philosophy (especially in its practical capacities) is.

Chapter 8: Parallels

I noted earlier that one major reason why the above digression into Socratic texts was necessary is that it exposed what appear to be parallels between the Wittgensteinian approach to philosophy and Socrates' views as they are presented in Plato's *Apology*. The reason this is important for the task at hand, (which, in case we have forgotten, is to try to make clear what 'philosophy' is), is that if such parallels can be substantiated, then it would indicate that the two views are compatible, if not outright in a complimentary relation to one another. And, if this is the case, then it would open up the way for us to draw from them both in our characterisation of philosophy, perhaps offering a more well rounded, and therefore, insightful, understanding of what the philosophical pursuit of wisdom entails.

Let us now consider these parallels. I began this investigation by noting that the simplest definition of philosophy is an etymological one that defines it as the pursuit of wisdom. It was also noted that 'wisdom' of any kind entails a certain kind of knowledge. By this preliminary standard, it seems that both the Wittgensteinian and the Socratic approaches to philosophy qualify. The Wittgensteinian view, as we saw, advocates for the pursuit of wisdom by expanding our knowledge of the conceptual underpinnings of ideas. Meanwhile, the Socratic view tries to spread wisdom in the very particular sense of the Socratic Paradox, the idea that true wisdom consists in expanding one's awareness (i.e. knowledge) of the depths of our unknowing. In any case, it is clear that both pursue wisdom, in their own ways, and thereby satisfy the etymological criteria for being accounts of philosophy. However, the points of compatibility between these two approaches to philosophy go beyond just their common aim of pursuing wisdom. Indeed, it is my contention that the ways in which they respectively go about pursuing wisdom are also not as different as they appear at first glance.

The first point of compatibility in this regard follows on from the Wittgensteinian observation that philosophy is not a discipline that is concerned with theories, hypotheses, and empirical proofs. Indeed, both views recognise that philosophy is born of a very particular kind of wonder, one who's wondrousness only intensifies upon scrutiny. The Wittgensteinian approach described how philosophy is, first and foremost, a reaction to the hidden wonder that saturates our world at every turn. It made clear how even questions like 'How is it that time can be measured?', which have empirical scientific answers, can still evoke this special kind of wonder, and how the philosopher is someone who recognises this wonder and responds to it by attempting to map it out. Admittedly, Socrates does not speak in these terms. Nevertheless, looked at a certain way, it can be shown that he too is reacting to philosophical wonder in a way which the Wittgensteinian view would recognise as constituting philosophy.

Indeed, the Wittgensteinian conception of philosophical wonder seems to mirror the implications of the Socratic Paradox. Let us consider further, for a moment, the Wittgensteinian view. If we recall, we saw that, according to this approach, the philosophical pursuit of wisdom is to be conducted by way of conceptual clarification. More specifically, philosophy is the activity of analysing ideas and arguments through the clarification of their conceptual content. That is to say, philosophy is not (according to the Wittgensteinian view) conducted through the giving of answers or the putting forward of theories, but by way of questioning, by making explicit the conceptual content of the words that people are using when they ask their questions and make their arguments. Waismann tells us that the philosopher "[does] not use arguments in order to prove or disprove any 'philosophic view'. As [he has] no views [he] can afford to

look at things as they are" (Waismann, 1968, p.12). Clearly, this shows that the Wittgensteinian approach abides by the axiom of the Socratic Paradox, that the philosopher recognises that he is worth nothing when it comes to wisdom and that he is, therefore, better off occupying himself with the analysis of ideas and the wonder they radiate rather than with formulating lofty answers to lofty questions.

Likewise, Socrates shows us that, for him, philosophy is not a matter of putting forward arguments or theories of one's own, but of utilising the Socratic Method in combination with a recognition of the Socratic Paradox to find out exactly what it is that someone else is saying, and to then critically analyse said view or idea. Socrates, as we saw, was adamant that what he was doing, indeed, what he was advocating others do, was to accept the Socratic Paradox, to recognise that true wisdom involves becoming aware of all the ways in which we cannot truly be sure of what one believes to be true. He makes clear that, like the Wittgensteinians advocate, he is responding to matters that interest him, not by putting forward arguments or theories of his own, but by investigating the underlying conceptual and logical structure of other people's arguments (the poets, craftsmen, politicians and other experts), to show that even the views and ideas that seem most reasonable and self-evident can be shown to contain flaws. In fact, he seems to focus his attention in particular on those matters and ideas that are considered settled by the orthodoxies of the city (something I will return to later when we consider the ways in which Socrates' position is useful in terms of an account of practical philosophy). In this sense, the Socratic approach (like the Wittgensteinian approach) characterises philosophy as being a kind of conceptual clarification, because it also delves into the logical implications of the ways in which people use particular words and concepts to formulate their views. In other words, we can say that the Wittgensteinian account of philosophy and the Socratic Paradox and Method represent two complementary ways of describing philosophy, at least in the sense that both views agree that it is not a matter of putting forward proofs or positing theorems, but of epistemic clarification through the critical conceptual analysis of ideas and arguments.

The second point of compatibility that is worth noting is that both views see philosophy as being an essentially maieutic process. By maieutic I mean the term derived from the Greek words "maieuesthai '[to] act as a midwife', [and] from maia 'midwife'" contemporarily defined as "of or denoting the Socratic mode of enquiry, which aims to bring a person's latent ideas into clear consciousness" (Oxford Living Dictionary, 2019; Klein, 1966, p.924). The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy explains further that the maieutic method "is that of eliciting ideas by questioning: the image [being] that the ideas are already there in the pregnant subject's

mind, but require midwifery to be made manifest" (Blackburn, 2005, p.220). In this regard, there is little doubt that the Wittgensteinian and the Socratic views are in agreement, as both views stress the importance of guiding people towards their own conclusions, i.e. acting as a midwife for wisdom, so to speak, over acting as a professor of wisdom.

This parallel derives from the earlier observation that both Socrates and the Wittgensteinian approach agree that the nature of philosophy is not argumentative, adversarial, or combative, but rather a matter of navigating concepts. Both Socrates, and the Wittgensteinian approach agree on the manner by which this conceptual navigation, i.e. philosophy ought to be conducted. It is a matter of *guiding* people (including oneself) towards a deeper understanding of their own ideas and of what they think for themselves, rather than arguing one position over another and trying to force a certain conception of the truth upon people. As we saw earlier, Waismann, when describing how philosophy might be conducted 'undogmatically', stressed the importance of doing just this when he insisted that philosophers do not "*force* [their] interlocutor[s]" but rather "leave [them] free to choose, accept or reject any way of using [their] words" (Waismann, 1968, p.12). He tells us that, "If we strictly adhere to this method – going over the argument, asking him at each step whether he is willing to use an expression in a certain way, if not, offering him alternatives, but leaving the decisions to him and only pointing out what their consequences are – no dispute can arise" (Waismann, 1968, p.12). As well as showing that the Wittgensteinian approach characterises philosophy as being inherently maieutic and dialectical, these passages also bare uncanny resemblance to the kind of language that Socrates used when employing the Socratic Method. For, as we saw earlier, Socrates also continuously stressed the importance of asking questions and of allowing one's interlocutors to form their own conclusions regarding their views considering the observations borne out by these lines of questioning. Indeed, if one did not know that it was Waismann who made these aforementioned statements, one might easily guess that it was some ancient Greek philosopher influenced by Socrates who made them. After all, Socrates made explicit in his defence, at every possible opportunity, that the manner by which he conducted his philosophy was by conversation, by asking questions, by inviting people to ask him questions, and by exploring the often problematic logical implications of any particular view. In short, it is clear that both the Wittgensteinian and the Socratic approaches agree on the importance of a maieutic, conversational approach to conducting philosophy.

The third point of compatibility follows on from the second, and lies in the fact that both the Wittgensteinian approach and Socrates' note that philosophy is an uncomfortable, and often thankless, business. As we saw, what got Socrates in so much trouble was his insistence on

spreading the Socratic Paradox by way of maieutic conversation. By questioning everyone, regardless of their level of esteem, celebrity, reputation or apparent expertise, and by trying to show them that they were less wise than they realised, Socrates attracted a great deal of scorn (which led to the slanderous accusations against him in the first place). Indeed, this is not surprising considering the fact that those who occupy themselves with challenging the status quo often find themselves the subjects of censorship and persecution. This is even more true in Socrates' case because he doesn't just challenge the status quo but he goes further by arguing that there cannot ever be a status quo that is free of faults (i.e. true wisdom lies in recognition that "human wisdom is worth very little, or nothing at all" (Plato, 2010, 23a)).

Similarly, the Wittgensteinian approach noted that the nature of philosophical wonder is such that any philosophical investigation of it only serves to make more apparent its wondrousness, rendering philosophy an inherently uncomfortable and, for those who expect it to provide lofty answers to lofty questions, unsatisfying, endeavour. As Waismann noted earlier, "the philosopher as he ponders over some such problems has the appearance of a man who is deeply disquieted. He seems to be straining to grasp something which is beyond his powers. The words in which such a question presents itself do not quite bring out into the open the real point – which may, perhaps more aptly, be described as the recoil from the incomprehensible." (Waismann, 1968, p.3). The Wittgensteinian approach, like Socrates, recognises that human reason is not capable of fully understanding and, thereby, doing away with questions that espouse philosophical wonder. It attributes this, in part, to the inherently imprecise nature of human language in the sense that no language has a separate word for every individual concept that the human mind is capable of conceptualising. In any case, it acknowledges the fact that philosophy is a process which does not yield the satisfying answers which one might hope for as a fledgling philosopher, and that it instead consists in asking even more questions and in describing "the logical relations of implication, exclusion, compatibility, presupposition, point and purpose, role and function among propositions in which a given problematic expression occurs." (Hacker, 2015, p.45). Thus, it becomes apparent that the Wittgensteinian approach to philosophy, once again, mirrors Socratic observations regarding the nature of philosophy, this time with regards to its vexatious nature.

I am sure that, if one were to devote the time, several more major and many more minor points of compatibility between the Socratic and Wittgensteinian accounts of philosophy would come to light. For now, however, these parallels suffice to show what I intended, namely, that there exist such points of compatibility between the two views, and that the more one looks at them in juxtaposition, the more it becomes apparent that there may be more going on here than

just a lack of conflict between them. Indeed, it has by now become clear that Socrates, in Plato's *Apology,* echoes many of the same observations made by Wittgensteinian thinkers about the nature of philosophy (or rather, the Wittgensteinian approach echoes Socrates', seeing as to how the latter preceded the former by almost two and a half millennia). However, the fact that these parallels concern the ideas that lie at the very heart of both views respectively suggests that they are, in fact, not only compatible with one another, but outright complimentary to each other, formulating many of the same conclusions in slightly different ways.

Of course, just because several people say something, does not by any means make it the case. This would be a fallacious move by any standard. Nevertheless, the compatibility and complementarity that the Socratic and Wittgensteinian approaches to philosophy exhibit should not go unnoticed. If two philosophers so far removed from one another both in terms of time and in philosophical tradition can each independently come to such uncannily similar conclusions about the nature of philosophy, then perhaps (as I suspect and argue here) there is something to their observations, especially considering the fact that neither approach has, as of yet, made any unreasonable claims. Furthermore, as I will go on to show in the following section, this becomes even more apparent when we are made aware of how the Socratic approach further supplements the Wittgensteinian view (or vice versa) by accounting for its gaps with regards to clarifying the nature of philosophy's practical dimensions.

Part 3: The Practical Philosopher Is A Gadfly

Chapter 9: The Gadfly- Filling in the Gaps

By now, it has become clear that the Wittgensteinian approach to philosophy and the Socratic view represent two sides of the same coin, so to speak, each in its own way making evident that philosophy is a maieutic endeavour of conceptual and logical clarification that often yields inherently uncomfortable results. We have seen how the Wittgensteinian position emphasises the ways in which philosophy might be done theoretically. We have also seen that, despite this, the major points of the Wittgensteinian characterization of philosophy are mirrored in some way or other by the Socratic view. However, what we have not explored yet, and what may, by now, have become implicitly apparent, is that the key to describing the nature of the practical dimensions of philosophy (the missing element from our understanding of philosophy more generally so far) lies in the Socratic approach. In other words, while the Wittgensteinian approach to characterising philosophy makes clear to us what philosophy is from a theoretical

perspective, the Socratic view does the same from a practical perspective. Each has its own insights while complimenting the insights of the other, and, taken together, they form a relatively well rounded view of what philosophy is.

So, what is it that the Socratic approach tells us regarding the nature of practical philosophy which the Wittgensteinian approach overlooked? How is it exactly that Socrates makes apparent the nature of practical philosophy? In order to answer these questions we ought to go back to our preliminary discussion of the likely differences between theoretical and practical kinds of philosophy from Chapter 5. It was noted there that what makes the Wittgensteinian approach deficient in issues concerning practical philosophy is its focus on theoretical contexts of inquiry and its relative quietism when it comes to matters of a normative nature like "legal and political philosophy, let alone […] philosophical investigations into economics and economic reasoning" (Hacker, 2015, p.51). It was also noted that this implies that practical philosophy is philosophy *lived* rather than conducted in a theoretical setting. In other words, practical philosophy, whatever it is, must be concerned, not only with the matters that affect the everyday lives of individuals, but also with a constant application of philosophical principles and reasoning to such matters of everyday life.

With this in mind, it is not difficult to see how Socrates meets these standards for an account of practical philosophy to a tee. Socrates, as we saw, echoes the Wittgensteinian sentiment that philosophy involves a maieutic and conversational pursuit of knowledge through conceptual clarification. However, Socrates also shows us that a persistent and critical reflection of ideas lies at the very heart of practical philosophy as well. The Socratic Paradox does not just show that philosophy involves a theoretical acceptance of the limits of human wisdom, it also (and this is key) has implications for how the philosopher and laymen alike ought to interact with ideas. Indeed, as Socrates himself demonstrated, a genuine acceptance of the Socratic Paradox committed him (as it commits any who recognise the truth it holds) to a constant striving to be equally critical of all ideas regardless of their source or apparent self-evidence.

As Socrates nears the end of his defence in Plato's *Apology*, he presents the following point to his jury:

> "What you should know is that if I'm the sort of person I say I am, your killing me will do me less damage than it does you […]. So as a matter of fact, men of Athens, far from defending myself, as one might suppose, what I'm doing now is actually defending *you* […]. Because if you do put me to death, you won't easily find anyone else quite like me, attached by the god to the city, if it's not too comic an image, as

> if to a horse – a big and noble horse, but one that's rather sleepy because of its size, all the time needing to be woken up by some sort of gadfly: this is the kind of role the god gave me when he attached me to the city, and the result is that there's never a moment when I'm not waking you up and cajoling and rebuking you, each one of you, the whole day long, settling on you wherever you may be. Another one like me, Athenians, as I say, it won't be easy for you to find, and if you take my advice you'll spare me; but probably you'll be irritated at me, and like people who are woken up as they're nodding off you'll hit out at me (Plato, 2010, 30c-31a).

Herein lies the key to understanding what practical philosophy is, its implications, and how they set it apart from the theoretical dimensions of philosophy which we have seen so far. Perhaps the most concise way of formulating the nature of philosophy's practical dimensions would be to say that the practical philosopher takes what we have learned so far about the maieutic and paradoxical nature of wisdom, and applies it to his everyday thinking. In keeping with Socrates' metaphor, the practical philosopher acts as a gadfly for wisdom and knowledge, constantly waking people (and ideally himself) up to the reality of their own ignorance and calling into question ideas, knowledge, and wisdom wherever it is purported to lie. Put differently, whereas the theoretical philosopher engages in philosophical inquiry out of interest, and as a reaction to philosophical wonder, the practical philosopher does so also out of a recognition that critical and maieutic philosophical thinking is not only beneficial but vital, for both individual epistemic health and for the health of a society. As Socrates pointed out, everyone benefits from the endeavours of a philosophical gadfly, and this, as we will see, is the case on both an individual level as well as on a societal scale.

Practical Philosophy is 'Externally-Reflective'

The first strand of practical philosophy that comes to light from a consideration of the above Socratic passages is one which we can refer to as the 'externally-reflective' nature of practical philosophy. That is to say, it inherently busies itself with reflecting on and criticizing the ideas (and particularly the values) of others. To understand what it means to say that philosophy, in its practical form, is 'externally-reflective', it is worth returning briefly to the Socratic Paradox. It was noted earlier that philosophy in general is, to a large extent, based on the fundamental idea that "human wisdom is worth very little, or nothing at all" (Plato, 2010, 23a-b) and that the wisdom that the philosopher espouses consists in a recognition of this fact. In other words, it was noted that the more one considers any given matter philosophically, the

more its complexity is made clear and, consequently, the less sure one can be about what one thinks regarding said matter. As a result, through critical and maieutic reflection, the philosopher becomes ever more aware of the reality that those who purport to be the most sure about any given topic, more often than not, simply haven't pondered the complexities of their area of interest and supposed 'expertise' long enough to realise all the ways in which their opinions are flawed, incomplete, or incompatible with one another. If no one can know anything for sure, as the Socratic Paradox has shown us, and if this only becomes more apparent the more one ponders any given matter (as the nature of philosophical wonder stipulates), then those who suppose they do know things for certain must simply not have pondered things long enough or in enough detail for the hidden depths of their ignorance to have become apparent to them. In the same way, all ideas and values that are considered self-evident by those who hold them, especially those values and norms on which societies are built, can, given enough scrutiny, be shown to be wanting or incompatible with one another. It is the practical philosopher's job to bring these epistemic shortcomings to light wherever he finds them.

So, we know now that the practical philosopher applies his knowledge of the Socratic Paradox externally to society's ideas, but how is it that this is beneficial, let alone vital, to society's prosperity? The practical philosopher's job, analogous to the gadfly, is to tirelessly wake the city, i.e. society, up to its own ignorance. He does this by being critical of all ideas and by responding especially sceptically towards anyone who claims to be particularly sure of anything, or any norm or idea that convention has rendered apparently unequivocal. In other words, the vital role that the practical philosopher plays in society is preventing the stagnation of ideas, norms, thinking, and general societal progress by constantly calling these things into question and thereby promoting constructive discussion and catalysing more precise understandings of the complexities involved in any particular question. It is only by being confronted by new questions which they cannot answer that the purportedly wise can be motivated to abandon their convictions and entertain the (strong) possibility that the truth lies beyond what they currently think they know, and perhaps even transcends their cognitive abilities to understand altogether.

This is not to say that these scholars, politicians, economists and legislators etc. know nothing at all in a literal sense regarding their areas of interest, nor that it is the practical philosopher's role to crassly bulldoze through anyone and everyone's ideas with the nihilistic goal of proving that no one knows anything and that we therefore may as well all just give up on having ideas altogether. On the contrary, in fact, by highlighting the ways in which the contentions of society's experts are wanting, the practical philosopher implicitly encourages

them to, on the one hand, refine their views so as to contend with these new questions, and, on the other hand, to remain conscious of their fallibility and open to new, more insightful ways of looking at things, both of which are clear benefits to society.

Just as an experienced gardener prunes the plants in his garden so as to allow them to be more fruitful, the practical philosopher points out the shortcomings in the orthodoxies of society and the purported wisdom of its experts in order to promote the growth of ever more fruitful ways of approaching or conceptualising questions, problems, and ideas. Put differently, the practical philosopher, if he is doing his job properly, embodies the role of the devil's advocate to his core. And, like any properly intentioned devil's advocate, he does so not out of any destructive or malicious intent, but in order to test his opponent's ideas to their limits so as to ensure that they reach the highest standard possible. This applies both to the practical philosopher's relationship with society's experts as well as his relationship with the values, norms, and orthodoxies of a society or its subgroups. The only difference is that in the case of the former, the practical philosopher tests the integrity of the ideas and views of those who are seen as experts in their field, whereas in the latter, he tests the integrity of the ideas and the views of society's members, i.e. their norms and values. In this way, the external-reflection that is inherent to practical philosophy shows its benefit to society: it motivates society's experts to be vigilant of new ways in which they might deepen their understandings of whatever they are experts in, and it stimulates social progress by affecting societies the way a gadfly might affect a lazy horse, preventing societies from becoming stagnant in their norms, values, and collective knowledge.

Before we move on to looking at the second aspect of practical philosophy that is borne out by Socrates' revelations, it is worth pointing out that what I have noted just now also accounts for the traditional association (pointed out in Chapter 5) between practical philosophy and matters to do with politics, economics, law and individual morality. It is, in part, because these are the matters which most people in society have an opinion on, as this both allows for and necessitates the above-described devil's advocacy. However, more importantly, it is because political, economic, legal, and individual moral ideas are those upon which societies are built, and therefore, they are those which most directly impact the everyday lives of individual people. With this in mind it becomes rather easy to see why the practical philosopher might spend a considerable amount of his time occupying himself with matters such as these. Of course, this does not mean that the practical philosopher is limited to questions of politics, law, economics, and individual morality. Indeed, as should have become clear by now, the practical philosopher, like any other kind of philosopher, is not limited in terms of what subjects

he may ask questions about. Nevertheless, considering the practical philosopher's aforementioned interest in applying philosophical reasoning to everyday matters, it just so happens to be the case that questions of political, economic, legal, and individual moral norms and values are those which tend to have the greatest influence on the everyday lives of people.

Practical Philosophy is 'Self-Reflective'

I have shown so far how Socrates' example of the gadfly demonstrates the 'externally-reflective' nature of practical philosophy and how this plays a vital role in the health of any society. However, a second, and perhaps, by now already obvious characteristic of practical philosophy is that, at the same time as being externally-reflective, it is also inherently 'self-reflective' in nature. Put simply, this means that the practical philosopher does not merely subject others to his 'gadflying' (for lack of a better term), but he also turns such philosophical scrutiny on himself, constantly searching for new ways in which his own knowledge may be flawed, and relishing anyone who is able to point these areas out to him. In essence, this shows that there are two dimensions to the 'self-reflective' nature of practical philosophy.

First of all, the practical nature of philosophy is 'self-reflective' because it demands that those who want to engage in philosophy be as critical of themselves and their own views as they are of others (granted, this may very well be an unachievable ideal, but it is an ideal worth aspiring to nonetheless). Secondly, practical philosophy is inherently 'self-reflective' in the sense that it, at its very core, seeks to promote to everyone (not just to philosophers) the indispensable epistemic value of being open to criticism and of keeping in mind that no matter how sure we may feel of any one opinion, the only truly reasonable position to be completely committed to is to be open minded and to welcome with open arms any conversation that might expose errors in one's thinking and thereby catalyse its refinement.

Earlier, it was pointed out that Hacker said of the philosopher that he "is not a citizen of the republic of ideas" (Hacker, 2015, p.45). We have since seen several ways in which this holds true and in which Socrates expressed similar sentiments. However, considering what we have now gathered regarding the inherently self-reflective nature of practical philosophy, one more parallel of note between the Socratic and Wittgensteinian approaches to philosophy comes to light. Namely, the self-reflective nature of practical philosophy reinforces the notion that a committed practical philosopher does not (when he is conducting philosophy) 'pick sides', so to speak, for he is always on the side of discovering ever more insightful ways of describing the conceptual and logical complexities of ideas. As a result, just like Socrates, when the

practical philosopher engages in a discussion with someone, he will not be coming to the table with a predetermined notion of his own with the hopes of convincing his interlocutor of it (this is what Hacker was alluding to when he said that the philosopher is not a citizen of the republic of ideas). Instead, he will be engaging in the conversation precisely because he hopes to *learn* something from his interlocutor (i.e. as of yet unconsidered ways in which his own ideas might not hold, and in which he might improve or amend them) and thereby benefit from the dialogue.

The practical philosopher does not approach a conversation with the goal of engaging in, and ideally winning, a debate, in which each side comes to the table with its own, predetermined convictions, and in which opponents try to convince one another of their own positions at the expense of each other's views. Indeed, this is because such a conversation can only have three outcomes, none of which are particularly enviable. The first possible outcome of such a traditional debate is that one party is able to convince the other that they are wrong about how they see an issue and that the first party's position is right, or at least that the second party's explanation of or opinion on an issue is more wrong, and the first less so. Given what we have learned about the Socratic Paradox, to suppose that one's own position is beyond reproach (which is ultimately what people who engage in these kinds of debates are doing) is the epitome of naiveté, and is, therefore, anything but advisable. As a result, all that this purportedly ideal outcome comes down to is that you have managed to convince your opponents to change their opinions from one necessarily flawed conviction to another, whereas you yourself have gained nothing more from the whole exercise other than an ally who now also holds a view that cannot be the whole truth. Clearly, this doesn't do anyone much good.

The second possible outcome of such a conversation is the converse of the first, i.e. that you are convinced by your opponents to lay down the standard of your convictions and to, instead, take up theirs. For obvious reasons, this is no more or less useful to anyone than the first scenario. Finally, the third scenario, which is the most likely, is one in which both parties, after some time spent attempting to badger one another into accepting each other's views, regress from the encounter without anyone having changed their mind about anything nor increased the depths of their insight to any degree, and in which no one has anything more to show for it than reinforced indignation for those who see things differently. It is obvious then, why the practical philosopher does his utmost to avoid such conversations, opting instead to avoid (as much as he can) pulling his own opinions into his maieutic inquiries, and, when he cannot avoid doing so, opting to invite and embrace full heartedly anyone who is able to demonstrate to him new ways in which his way of looking at things is flawed. The philosopher, in particular the practical philosopher, looks for and promotes conversations from which all

parties can benefit by coming to the table, not for a debate, but for a dialogue in which everyone recognises, from the onset, the overwhelming likelihood that their current views fall short of the truth, and in which both sides recognise the invaluable potential that lies in having one's views challenged by those who see things differently. On every level then, practical philosophy promotes both external *and* self-reflective ways of interacting with the world around us and the ideas and concepts that form our understandings of it.

With all of this in mind, it becomes even more evident why both the self, and external-reflection that are innate to practical philosophy, and which were alluded to in some way or other by both the Wittgensteinian view of philosophy and the Socratic approach, as well as the kind of conversation that the Socratic Method promotes, are vital, not only to philosophy, but also to a properly functioning and epistemically dynamic and healthy society (and individual). Furthermore, taken together, the inherent self-reflective and, simultaneously, externally-reflective nature of practical philosophy is reinforced by the Socratic notion that the practical philosopher's role is, first and foremost, that of being a metaphorical gadfly to society. Indeed, given the fact that his efforts were rewarded with a death sentence, we might say that, if ever there was a practical philosopher who was committed to the most fundamental principles of philosophy, it was Socrates.

Chapter 10: Some Remarks on Epistemic Self Reliance

Overall, I have by now succeeded in laying out at least the most fundamental characteristics of what philosophy is. We have seen how philosophy is born of an ineffable wonder which only deepens upon scrutiny. We have seen how philosophy has, at its heart, the goal of conceptual clarification and constructive maieutic dialogue and how it avoids making arguments, in favour of having conversations instead. We have also seen that these principles of philosophy manifest slightly differently when it comes to theoretical and practical philosophy, but that, in the end, both dimensions of philosophy emphasise complimentary points. Finally, we have just now seen how these principles of philosophy are employed in an inherently applied manner by the practical philosopher to the benefit of the epistemic dynamism of society and its individuals. In a nutshell then, everything that we have learned about philosophy so far has, in some way or another, had to do with the merits of scepticism, critique, and humility when it comes to one's relationship with knowledge (especially if one wants to engage in practical philosophy).

In other words, what we have learned about philosophy is that, above all, it advocates an epistemic self-reliance, i.e. the philosopher makes sure that we, as much as is possible, avoid ascribing to convictions simply on the basis that they are the convictions that the 'experts' hold, and that we instead build our own convictions through critical conceptual analysis (and remain perpetually open to having our minds changed). However, at the same time, it goes without saying that no one (philosopher and laymen alike) can realistically live their lives in a purely epistemically self-reliant manner, for if we limited ourselves to having opinions only on issues that we have, for ourselves, considered in detail, then we would spend every waking moment of our lives doing nothing else. Therefore, before this investigation into the nature of philosophy can come to a close, we must first find a way to reconcile the implausibility of total epistemic self-reliance with the fact that epistemic self-reliance is the very principle which philosophy holds in the highest regard.

Epistemic self-reliance has been defined in several different ways over the years, but the crux of the idea is that "[it] is the practice of relying on one's own faculties rather than those of others, in the formation and maintenance of beliefs" (Byerly, 2014, p.55). In response to this idea, several thinkers have argued that "the life of full epistemic self-reliance 'is an ideal that we [humans] must give up because of its impracticality, but a superior being could live up to it, and would be superior for being able to do so (2012:9)'" (Byerly, 2014, p.55). Of course, in a perfect world, all of our convictions would be formed from our own discoveries, experiences, and cognitive faculties and we would have to take nothing on faith, or on the word of any purported 'experts'. In such a world, everyone would come to their own well thought out conclusions regarding everything from the physical laws of our universe to medical and nutritional diagnoses and decisions, to what occurred when in history and for what reasons, and everything in between. We would not have to take it on faith that the diagnoses of our doctors are accurate, or that the course of treatment that they prescribe will be effective. For, we would understand enough about our own bodies and about human bio-chemistry to self diagnose our ailments, and to come to an informed decision regarding what chemical interactions need to occur in order for us to be cured, and which medications would catalyse these interactions best. In such a world we would only need doctors in a consulting capacity, as a second opinion to our own, so to speak, just in case we have missed something. The important thing to realise is that we would not simply adopt the beliefs 'this is the medicine I ought to take' and 'this is the illness I have', simply because someone with a white lab coat, a stethoscope, and a degree has told us so. The same would apply for virtually all other matters. We would all be our own oncologists, our own physicists, our own psychotherapists, our own

professors of engineering, of history, of economics, and of morality. We would hold only beliefs derived from a genuine understanding of the matters at hand. In such an ideal world, all our beliefs would truly be the fruits of our own intellectual and cognitive efforts, leaving nothing to be taken on the authority of someone else.

The problem, however, is that the realities of our own world are not such as those in the ideal one. Our own world, it goes without saying, is not a perfect one. According to the realities of our world, if we held only those beliefs which we ourselves had arrived at, we wouldn't be left with very many at all. In our world not even the most intellectually capable among us, the savants, let alone laymen, can live a life of pure epistemic self-reliance without abandoning virtually all their beliefs. This is because there is not enough time in the day, nor in the average human life, for anyone to develop an informed opinion on all the matters that concern them. Therefore, the only beliefs that would be left under these conditions in the real world would (depending on the opportunities, capacities, and inclinations of the person in question) at best be severely limited in scope, and at worst, crippling in terms of decision making (we can hardly make decisions that involve matters regarding which we have no beliefs). As a result, no one can live a purely epistemically self-reliant life without dramatically limiting the number of beliefs they have to the point that they wouldn't be able to lead much of a life or make many decisions at all. This 'impracticality' of the ideally epistemically self-reliant life is a major reason why many, as mentioned earlier, see it as necessary to abandon the ideal outright.

However, doing so is a mistake. Contrary to what several thinkers have argued, this implausibility of pure epistemic self-reliance does not mean that it is an ideal that we ought to give up entirely because of its impracticality. Just because an ideal is not achievable, does not necessarily mean that people cannot benefit from aspiring to it. And, this is absolutely the case when it comes to the ideal of an epistemically self-reliant life. Of course it is an unattainable standard. But, just as it would be ridiculous to suggest that people might ever fully achieve an epistemically self-reliant life, or that the *fully* epistemically self-reliant life is even a desirable one, it is also laughable to suggest that people would not do well to, as a general rule, try to be a little bit more critical of the epistemic authorities on which they base many of their beliefs. Indeed, we cannot all be experts on everything, and so relying only on our own knowledge for our beliefs rather than also looking to the knowledge of others is not a viable strategy. This is why experts are valued by all societies in the first place. Because the division of epistemic labour allows us to benefit from ideas, concepts, technologies, infrastructures and innovations that would take countless lifetimes for any one individual to completely comprehend let alone actualise.

Nevertheless, it goes without saying that few people, if anyone at all, can say that they are reaching their full potential when it comes to even the realistic limits of their epistemic self-reliance. Far too many people are willing to take far too much on the authority of others, and if this were not the case, we would be better off for it. Individuals can only benefit from being more engaged and vigilant when it comes to how open they are to accepting the beliefs of others simply because they appear to know what they are talking about. Not only this, but a society made up of people who rely on the knowledge of others to get by is likely to be much less epistemically dynamic and amenable to progress than one in which people make a conscious effort, as much as they can, to think for themselves. This is because in the latter scenario, more members of society are able to engage knowledgably with each other and partake in both empirical and philosophical discussions with one another, elevating the epistemic standard of society overall, so to speak. We can all aspire, and not only aspire, but work towards, becoming *more* (rather than *fully)* epistemically self-reliant and to strive to limit the degree to which we rely on the authority of others for the formation and maintenance of our beliefs. The beauty of our imperfect world is precisely the fact that people can do better. And the mere fact that we will never achieve our *best* is never a good reason not to try to do *better*.

Of course, however, there is the risk that certain people will miss the mark and begin to become overly confident in their epistemic self-reliance to the point where they may begin to shirk the advice of those who really do happen to know better. However, to do so would be to miss the very point that makes epistemic self-reliance a worthy ideal, the fact that it promotes lively discussion and epistemic self-improvement, *not* the idea that we should be sceptical of others to the point of epistemic standstill. Clearly, we do not want a world in which people are no longer willing to heed the advice of those who know more than them. As I noted earlier, there is a place for the experts, and there is a place for taking certain things on the authority of others. However, as is almost always the case with these things, there is a delicate balance that must be struck in order to avoid such pitfalls.

This is where the practical philosopher and his application of the principles of philosophy that we have gathered throughout the chapters of this paper thus far comes into play. If we can agree that, despite its impracticality, the ideal of epistemic self-reliance is still worth striving towards because of the benefits it can accrue (individual and societal epistemic betterment), then, surely, we can also agree that a necessary condition for pursuing such self-reliance is the realization that one's beliefs are not as well founded as one realised, or that they are not the result of one's own faculties in the first place. What better way to ensure this condition than by

way of the practical philosopher's message of diligent self *and* external epistemic reflection? For, it is the practical philosopher who reminds us that we ought to be ever conscious of the Socratic Paradox, the idea that true wisdom lies in conceptualising the depths of our unknowing, and that, if we think about any of our beliefs long enough, even those which are the result of epistemic self-reliance, they, without exception, reveal themselves to us as being less tenable than we had original realised. Furthermore, he promotes the recognition of this paradoxical epistemic reality and advocates for maieutic and conceptually focused dialogue rather than empirically based debate as the best way to contend with it. What's more, the practical philosopher, as we saw earlier, advocates these ideas, not only for other practical philosophers, theoretical philosophers or even philosophers outright, but also for laypeople. In this way, the message, efforts, and methods of the practical philosopher bridge the gap between epistemic self-reliance and a healthy, diligent, epistemic self-doubt, striking the balance necessary for the ideal of a more epistemically self-reliant life to compound the benefits to society and its individuals that our account of philosophy has, up until now, already proven to offer.

Chapter 11: The Gadfly – No Inconsequential Pest

At this point, I have said most of what I will be able to say within the limits of this paper regarding what an answer to the question 'What is philosophy?' is likely to look like. However, before I bring this investigation to a close, it will be worthwhile to go over some final observations regarding the current state of our own society which reinforce and further contextualise what is perhaps the most important observation that this paper has made regarding the nature of philosophy. The observation I am referring to is the fact that philosophy, while having its theoretical and rather esoteric dimensions, is also something with inherently practical applications that are meant, not only for philosophers, but for *everyone*. It is vital to realise that philosophy doesn't only benefit society by holding philosophers to the philosophical principle of acting as metaphorical gadflies to society, but by promoting this standard of healthy epistemic self-reliance kept in check by a perpetual underlying acknowledgment of the Socratic Paradox to all members of society.

We have seen so far the technical reasons why this is the case throughout chapters nine and ten. But, if we consider for a moment some of the major points of contention facing our societies today and the ways in which people seem to be dealing with them for the moment, then the benefits that philosophy (as I have defined it in this paper, especially in terms of its

practical dimensions) has to offer society become even more evident, if not outright nigh on undeniable. Take, for example, the current political and social climate in the United States. According to statistics published in a 2017 Pew Research Center report,

> "The shares of Republicans and Democrats [in the United States] who express *very* unfavourable opinions of the opposing party have increased dramatically since the 1990s […]. Currently, 44% of Democrats and Democratic leaners have a very unfavourable opinion of the GOP […]; 45% of Republicans and Republican leaners view the Democratic Party very unfavourably. In 1994, fewer than 20% in both parties viewed the opposing party very unfavourably" (*Political Polarization 1994-2017,* 2017; *The Partisan Divide on Political Values Grows Even Wider,* 2017).

Jonathan Haidt, in his book, *The Righteous Mind*, also makes note of this worrying phenomenon of animosity and polarization when it comes to people's opinions and beliefs regarding socio-political, economic, and more generally moral matters:

> "Things changed [in Washington, the media, and the political class more broadly] in the 1990s, beginning with new rules and new behaviours in Congress. Friendships and social contracts across party lines were discouraged. Once the human connections were weakened, it became easier to treat members of the other party as the permanent enemy rather than as fellow members of an elite club. Candidates began to spend more time and money on "oppo" […], in which staff members or paid consultants dig up dirt on opponents […] and then shovel it to the media. As one elder congressman recently put it, "This is not a collegial body anymore. It is more like gang behaviour. Members walk into the chamber full of hatred"" (Haidt, 2013, p. 497-498).

He goes on to note that "this shift to a more righteous and tribal mentality was bad enough in the 1990s, a time of peace prosperity and balanced budgets. But nowadays, when the fiscal and political situations are so much worse, many Americans feel that they're on a ship that's sinking, and the crew is too busy fighting with each other to bother plugging the leaks" (Haidt, 2013, p.498). Furthermore, if the aforementioned observations by the 2017 Pew Research Center report are anything to go by, then it appears that this infighting is not limited to the crew, but to the passengers as well.

Haidt attributes this insidious tribalistic phenomenon to what he calls the third principle of moral psychology, namely, that "morality binds and blinds" us (Haidt, 2013, p.412). This is to say that the very nature of moral convictions and beliefs is such that people hold them passionately and not just passively. This passion has the tendency to blind us to other

possibilities, especially those possibilities which stand in direct opposition to the ones which we entertain through our own beliefs. It also makes it easier for us to paint those who hold such views that are incompatible with our own as villains, as people who can only be saying what they are saying, not because they innocently don't realise that it is wrong, but precisely because they consciously and malignantly *want* the wrong things. All of this comes together to bind us further to our own moral points of view, and tends us towards being more concerned with sullying the reputations of our opponents through ad hominems than with having a constructive and mutually beneficial dialogue with them. It causes us to come to the table, like the congressman noted, 'full of hatred' for the opposition and with the hopes of exposing their views as abhorrent, rather than with an optimistic hope for a constructive discussion in which both parties might learn from the other and come away with reciprocally refined beliefs (such as those we considered in Chapter 9, see **Practical Philosophy is 'Self-Reflective'**).

For Haidt, all of this is because of an innate tendency that human beings have for relishing group membership and for finding a profound and intoxicating comfort in standing with others for a righteous cause. As he puts it,

> "human nature is 90 percent chimp and 10 percent bee. We are like chimps in being primates whose minds were shaped by the relentless competition of individuals with their neighbors […]. But human nature also has a more recent groupish overlay. We are like bees in being ultrasocial creatures whose minds were shaped by the relentless competition of groups with other groups" (Haidt, 2013, p.477-478).

We treat the truth of any matter, especially when it comes to normative matters such as those concerning the politics, economics, and laws under which we are organised and governed, as a question of picking the team which sees things the right way, and of supporting this team at all costs and at the immediate expense of all potential opposing teams (perspectives on the truth). But, as we should have gathered by now, the truth, like wisdom, is not something that any one faction possesses entirely while all other factions hold false truths. To suppose otherwise would be to forget the lessons of the Socratic Paradox and to submit to the naiveté that any one person, or group of people has a monopoly on wisdom, knowledge, or the truth regarding any given matter.

Perhaps Haidt is correct in his description of how and why this occurs, perhaps not. This is not especially important for us at the moment. What *is* important to realise at this point is twofold. The first thing to note is that this tribalism does indeed seem to, for whatever reason, be occurring at least in certain places (the United States), and that, where it is not occurring, (if there even exists such a place) it is still a very real risk worth avoiding. The second thing to

note, and this is perhaps the most consequential observation I will make regarding the nature of philosophy, is that the key to avoiding such socio-epistemic and moral polarisation lies precisely and unequivocally in disseminating the principles of practical philosophy, not only throughout the philosophical community, but also throughout any and all societies' general populations. Inherent to philosophy, among all the other things that have been noted so far, is the firm belief that everyone ought to think philosophically at least some of the time. Not everyone needs to dedicate their lives entirely to philosophical analysis of all the aspects of our world that emit ineffable philosophical wonder. Indeed, this would be a tall order for even the most diligent and committed philosopher. However, everyone (philosopher and layperson alike) would, without a doubt, be better off if they strove to optimise their epistemic self-reliance and to think in a slightly more self *and* externally-reflective manner, engaging in conversations maieuticly and with the necessary epistemic humility for them to be mutually beneficial to all the parties involved. And this, for the very reasons of avoiding the dangerous social discord that can and does result when the tribal instincts that Haidt points out and cautions us against are left unchecked.

As I have noted several times throughout this paper, this is no simple feat. Indeed, it is not the kind of thing that one can simply read in a textbook, commit to memory, file away in one's head, and hope to reap the benefits from later. It requires constant self-reminding, vigilant self-criticism, and a diligent independence of thought. Not even the most Socratically inspired and incorrigible philosopher is ever likely to commit these principles to habit to the point where he no longer needs to make a conscious effort to prevent himself from forgetting that all of his beliefs, at some level, must be flawed, for, this would be a transcendent state if ever there was one. We all, no matter how much we try, sometimes forget our ignorance, and this is forgivable so long as we honestly try to avoid doing so as much as we can, and so long as we do not respond with hostility when we do forget and someone reminds us of it. Just as every diamond has its inclusions which, if examined in the right light and with a strong enough loupe, become apparent, even the most apparently self-evident and sometimes foundational beliefs we hold reveal to us their imperfections if we look at them under the right conditions. Not only is this important in order to combat the social discord that was noted earlier, but it also further serves the vital function of stimulating epistemic dynamism on both an individual and societal level (as I noted earlier in Chapter 9). In short, for everyone to keep all of this in mind, and to consciously apply it to the best of their ability, is every bit as imperative as it is tedious.

In summary, I have so far shown two ways in which philosophy (or perhaps better said, philosophical thinking) can be seen as playing a vital role for society. I have shown, firstly,

that it serves the purpose of fostering epistemic self-reliance coupled with self and external-reflection to the effect of nurturing epistemic dynamism and preventing epistemic stagnation both on a societal and on an individual level. Secondly, I have also made clear that it serves the equally vital role of mitigating the socio-political, epistemic, and moral discord that can ensue when our tribal impulses are left unchecked by the wisdom of the Socratic Paradox. Put as simply as possible, philosophy is important because it (1) mitigates epistemic stagnation, and (2) mitigates social animosity and discord. However, there is one further way in which the principles of philosophy, as I have outlined them so far, demonstrate that philosophy is no trivial pursuit, that it is the responsibility of every individual to think philosophically to the best of their ability, and that it has very real society-influencing implications, especially in its practical manifestations. If we were to put it in terms possessing the brevity of points (1) and (2), we might say, philosophy is important (also) because it (3) mitigates evil.

This is a bold claim indeed. Nevertheless, it is a justified one, so long as we take a look at how exactly the term 'evil' is being used here (the Wittgensteinians would be proud). The sort of 'evil' which I purport can be mitigated by philosophy is of a particularly insidious kind, not least because of its apparent innocuity. Perhaps the most famous thinker to have commented on the kind of 'evil' that I am referring to here is Hannah Arendt, who, in her highly controversial 1963 report on the trial of the infamous Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann, commented on what she called the '*banality* of evil'. Consider the following abbreviated passage:

> "when I speak of the banality of evil, I do so only on the strictly factual level, pointing to a phenomenon which stared one in the face at the trial. Eichmann was not Iago and not Macbeth, and nothing would have been farther from his mind than to determine with Richard III "to prove a villain." Except for an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement, he had no motives at all. And this diligence in itself was in no way criminal; he certainly would never have murdered his superior in order to inherit his post. He merely, to put the matter colloquially, never realized what he was doing. […] He was not stupid. It was sheer thoughtlessness – something by no means identical with stupidity – that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period. […] That such remoteness from reality and such thoughtlessness can wreak more havoc than all the evil instincts taken together which, perhaps, are inherent in man – that was, in fact, the lesson one could learn in Jerusalem." (Arendt, 2006, p.714-716).

We see here that what Arendt found most striking about her experience at the trial was that this man, who by all conventional standards was as close to evil incarnate as one was likely to get, didn't seem particularly formidable or remarkable in any overtly obvious way. He had been an instrument of immeasurable pain and suffering, no doubt. And yet, this monster was not particularly monstrous in any conventionally apparent way. He was not the kind of monster we are used to seeing in horror, or even Bond films. Nor was he of the kind that thrillers and slasher novels warn us about. No doubt such conventional evils do exist. However, the more insidious evil, the kind that she saw sitting before the judges in Jerusalem was of a more 'banal' nature. It was an evil of indifference, born of 'thoughtlessness', a (perhaps wilful) deficiency of critical thought. Despite its banality, this evil showed itself to be capable of causing even more catastrophic destruction than its traditional counterparts, the likes of which our civilization has yet to (and perhaps never will) fully recover from. It is an evil that festers on an ignorance of one's ignorance and on appeals to epistemic authority, and which can eventually boil over into catastrophic manifestations (such as those of the 20th century). Eichmann, monstrous in his own way, illustrated this to a tee precisely because he was not an especially noteworthy character when considered purely in terms of his own personal characteristics.

The reason I bring this up is that it has two unequivocal implications. First, it demonstrates explicitly the very real dangers that can ensue when people do not think about things, especially those things that carry moral weight, with sufficient epistemic and philosophical integrity. Arendt's observations regarding the banality of evil show us that when people formulate and maintain beliefs based on the authority of others, simply because they see opportunity for personal gain in the holding of these beliefs (or for any other disingenuous reason), things can take a catastrophic turn very quickly. All it takes for bad ideas to infect and spread through a society is for its members not to question them; to be 'thoughtless' in the way that Eichmann was. And, what is perhaps most worrying of all about all of this is that, when it comes to our susceptibility to such thoughtlessness, we are no different from Eichmann. We are all capable of being vessels for unimaginable evil precisely because we are all prone to accepting beliefs on authority. Our earlier considered affinity for combative epistemic tribalism and our tendency to forget the innate fallibility of even those beliefs which we hold most dear only serves to compound this susceptibility to the banality of evil. Put bluntly, it is when people stop thinking that the greatest evils are catalysed, and people often don't realise all the ways in which they are not thinking.

This brings us directly to the second unequivocal implication of Arendt's observations. Namely, that the gadfly and the role he plays in society (both in and of himself and as an

example to the general populace) are integral for preventing precisely the conditions on which the 'banal' kind of evil thrives. This is what I meant earlier when I said that philosophy is important, in part, because it serves to mitigate evil. By constantly and unwaveringly poking at the ideas and beliefs of societies and their individuals, and by maieuticly engaging in the dissemination of the Socratic Paradox and the virtues of epistemic self-reliance, external, and self-reflection, the philosopher keeps the metaphorical horse that is society on its toes. And, in so doing, he combats and limits the conditions under which the 'banal' manifestations of evil can materialise. Furthermore, the practical philosopher does not just do this himself. Just as Socrates acted as an example to the idle youth of the city, inspiring them to attempt their own maieutic self and external reflections and to pursue their own epistemic self-reliance, the practical philosopher, in conducting his gadfly-like activities, serves as inspiration to others to do the same. In this way, he is capable of immense positive societal influence in the sense that he is able to catalyse a chain reaction of philosophical thinking by engaging with those around him and by helping them to see the ways in which their beliefs are less solid than they realise. With each interaction, there is the possibility that he might awaken a self and external-reflection in his interlocutor that would have otherwise remained dormant, which would have prevented their progress towards epistemic self-reliance, and which would have paved the way toward (1) epistemic stagnation, (2) social animosity and discord, and (3) 'banal' manifestations of evil on a potentially cataclysmic scale. All said, in response to the question 'What is philosophy?', it seems imperative to include some remarks to the effect that, philosophy, like the gadfly, is humble in appearance and often swatted away unappreciatively even though it is far from inconsequential, performing many a vital service to the epistemic health and vigour of society and its individuals.

Chapter 12: Conclusions

In order to wrap this investigation up, it seems appropriate that we return to the remarks made in its introduction in order to assess the degree to which it has managed to satisfy its original aims. I began this paper with the seemingly innocuous but actually dizzying question, 'What is philosophy?'. A frustration with my inability to formulate a coherent and moderately holistic answer to this question despite the amount of time and effort I had spent contemplating and formally studying philosophy prompted me to realise that far too little attention is given to metaphilosophical analysis by both accomplished and dabbling philosophers alike. In this sense, we might say that the aim of this paper was to formulate such a coherent and relatively

holistic description of what philosophy is. This frustration also gave rise to the suspicion that the key to characterising the nature of philosophy might lie in the observation that, rather than providing answers, philosophy seems to provide us only with more questions. As a result, the paper focused on this fundamental characteristic in its quest to describe philosophy. All said, when it comes to this aim of accounting for the nature of philosophy and of testing the aforementioned suspicion that questions, as opposed to answers, lie at its heart, I think it is fair to say that this investigation has been, by and large, successful.

The account of philosophy which I have constructed herein answers the question, 'What is philosophy?' in three major respects. Firstly, it accounts for *why* philosophy is, i.e. philosophy is a response to an ineffable kind of wonder that pervades the conceptual underpinnings of the ideas and world around us. Secondly, it also accounts for *what* philosophy is by tying together metaphilosophical ideas drawn from various philosophical traditions (the two which I have termed the Wittgensteinian and the Socratic respectively in particular). It shows that they are not only compatible but complementary to one another and that, taken together, they combine to form an account of not only the theoretical dimensions of philosophy done for its own sake, but also the inherently applied dimensions of practical philosophy done for the sake of bettering oneself and the world in which one exists. Thirdly, and perhaps most prominently, this account of philosophy has stressed what it is that makes philosophy *important*. It shows that a society of individuals that are devoid of philosophical thinking (i.e. self and external-reflection with a conscious effort toward optimising epistemic self-reliance) is one which is prone to all sorts of insidious ills (among them, epistemic stagnation, social animosity and discord, and 'banal' manifestations of evil). In so doing, this account of philosophy demonstrates the philosopher's capacity and responsibility to combat these very ills by being an unapologetic epistemic gadfly to society and its members. In all of this, this account of philosophy has fully acknowledged the vital role that questioning as opposed to answering plays in philosophy, and, all taken together, it shows itself to be a rather comprehensive, holistic, and far from trivial answer to the question, 'What is philosophy?'.

There is, perhaps, one sense in which this account does not meet the aims stated in the introduction to this paper. I mentioned at the very beginning that part of what frustrated me about my chosen area of study was the fact that, unlike virtually every other discipline, academic or otherwise, I was unable to answer, in a wieldy way that even a ten-year-old might understand, what 'philosophy' is. Needless to say, a ten-year-old might struggle to comprehend the answer I have provided here to the question, 'What is philosophy?'. So, in this respect I may not have succeeded (although someone else, very well might in the future). Nevertheless,

it seems likely from what we have learned about philosophy and its inclination for conceptual clarification that the best way to confer the nature of philosophy to those who are not yet experienced in it, is to do so maieuticly by offering a series of examples and analogies for what the philosopher does, the kinds of questions he investigates, and how he investigates them. There is no way to summarise philosophy in a sentence which a ten-year-old might understand apart from, perhaps, 'philosophy is asking questions, *always*' (although even this is uncomfortably reductive and myopic). Beyond this, if anything can be taken away from the account of philosophy which I have presented here, it is that anytime someone does ask us 'What is philosophy?', we, as philosophers, ought to recognise this as a vital opportunity to fulfil our role as the gadfly and to maieuticly promote and awaken society and its members to their fallibility and their potential for improvement.

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